the weekly Standard

JUNE 29, 1998

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CLINTON'S LAP DOG

David Tell on Steven Brill, pseudo-press critic and White House mouthpiece

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Wishful Thinking on China
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Nixon and His Monica
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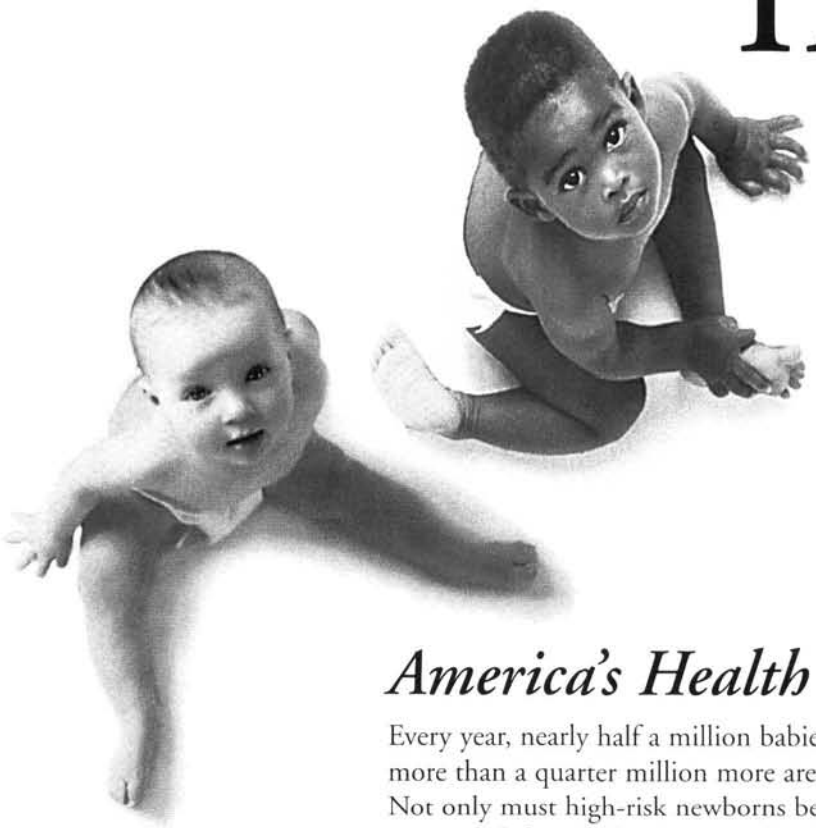
Who's delivering more healthy full-term babies?



America's Health Plans are.

Every year, nearly half a million babies are born premature, and more than a quarter million more are born with low birthweights. Not only must high-risk newborns be hospitalized for long periods, many are left with developmental problems that last a lifetime.

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According to a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, women in HMOs are more likely to have prenatal care in their first trimester than women in old-style medicine. As a result of such programs, health plans have been able to reduce premature births–in some cases by as much as 27%.

Our efforts are paying off by saving some of the heartbreak and expense of high-risk and premature babies. And that's just one more way we're working to make health care better.

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HEALTH PLANS

Working to Make Health Care Better.

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the weekly
Standard

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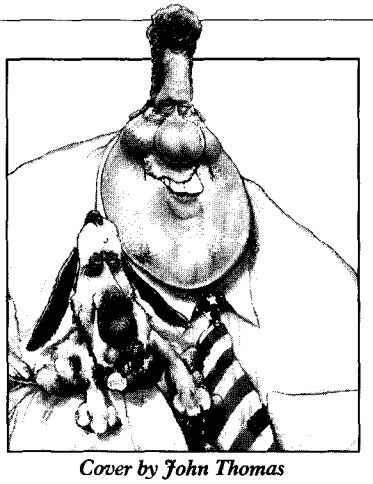

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The Audit Bureau Member

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John Kerry's Nicotine Fit

"We are going to give a new definition to hypocrisy in the U.S. Senate today," Sen. John Kerry portentously announced during debate last week over the tobacco bill. And so the Massachusetts Democrat did. Kerry objected to the idea that raising the price of cigarettes should be called a tax. "To use the word 'tax,'" he intoned, "is to use the word that has been the centerpiece of a billion-dollar advertising campaign. If this is a tax, this is the one tax in America that nobody has to pay—nobody—unless you buy a pack of cigarettes. This is a tax that is purely voluntary." Hmm. If the tax is "purely voluntary," to use the senator's eloquent phrase, then that must mean that buying and smoking cigarettes is purely voluntary. And if this is the case, then smokers are responsible for their own habits and are neither in the grip of an addiction nor under the spell of advertising campaigns, billion-dollar or otherwise. The Scrapbook happens to believe this is true, but the tobacco bill the senator was defending had no room in it for the concepts of individual responsibility and voluntary action. Hypocrisy, thy name is Kerry.

The Friends of Brent Scowcroft

As promised on this page last week, an update on Brent Scowcroft's invitation to 28 worthies to join him, Presidents Bush, Carter, and Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Lawrence Eagleburger in signing a treacly "Open Letter to the U.S. Congress" aimed at overawing congressional critics of President Clinton's Tiananmen Square summit. The letter appeared as a full-page ad, paid for by the "United States-China Education Foundation," in last Wednesday's *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.

Scowcroft batted an impressive .750, with 21 of the 28 former big shots signing on. Who resisted his entreaties? Henry Fowler, Melvin Laird, Walter Mondale, Dan Quayle, and Donald Rumsfeld. And also both of the men whose names were misspelled in Scowcroft's original invitation, Lloyd Bentsen and Caspar Weinberger. Coincidence? The Scrapbook tips its hat to the Magnificent Seven for their principles, but wonders whether Scowcroft might raise his batting average in the future by investing in a spell-checker.

A Killer and Her Boy

Earlier this month, a Superior Court judge in Washington, D.C., named George Mitchell ruled that convicted murderer Latrena Pixley "is not a threat to her son's physical or emotional well-being" and so is fit to take custody of the boy, a 2-year-old named Cornelious who is currently living in Maryland with a woman he calls "Mommy."

Pixley, as Tucker Carlson reported in a Weekly Standard cover story in January, is a District of Columbia woman who smothered her infant daughter to death several years ago because the baby "wouldn't stop crying." At the time, Judge Mitchell sentenced Pixley to probation for the second-degree murder. "I tried to understand the drama that the—your life had been very bad," the judge explained to Pixley after the sentencing. "You had gone through the kind of crisis that would cause a person to do things, and your mind gets warped, and you get depressed, you get down, you get oppressed and you do things."

Follow the reasoning? If so, you'll be able to make sense of Judge Mitchell's latest idea—to send Pixley and her son to Hannah House, a supervised group home in Washington. It wasn't an original idea. A couple of years ago, Mitchell did the same thing, ordering Pixley to report to Hannah House. Only problem was, Pixley never showed up, and the judge was forced to send her back to jail. Sadly, one fears this won't be the last time Latrena Pixley's name makes the newspaper.

Lexicons from Heaven

Ever since J. Bottum's Casual "You Can't Eat Alger Hiss" appeared in our June 1 issue, with its account of his toddler daughter's destruction of his Greek lexicon, dictionaries of ancient Greek have come pouring in from concerned and generous readers—one from a sociology professor who taught himself Homeric Greek, another from a retired writer who insists that all educated people are fluent in Greek and Latin, still another

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Scrapbook

from a classicist's widow who is sure her husband would want our Books & Arts editor to have it. With thanks to all, we have to insist that it stop: What with all these lexicons lying around, THE SCRAPBOOK is starting to feel guilty that its classical education began and ended with pig Latin.

BACON BITS

It was on March 13 that the Pentagon's public-affairs office released information from Linda Tripp's confidential security file, in violation of the federal Privacy Act. Only days after, the department announced an internal investigation. The events of the illegal leak took a few hours, but the investigation has now taken more than three months. Last week, though, the Pentagon assured Congress that it would release its findings no later than July 9 (THE SCRAPBOOK is predicting a July 4 press release). The question then will be whether President Clinton or defense secretary Bill Cohen will hold anyone—such as Pentagon spokesman Ken Bacon—accountable.

THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE

In our May 18 issue, Matt Labash reported the story of Maj. Jacquelyn Parker, the Pentagon pin-up girl for combat gender integration who helped destroy the careers of several distinguished Air Force pilots from the 174th Air National Guard Fighter Wing, once known as the "Boys from Syracuse." After a disastrous year-long training stint in the F-16 (in which Parker got lost during flights, forgot to aim her missiles, and nearly killed herself), she withdrew from the program, but complained to New York Guard brass that she'd been treated unfairly. Cowardly New York Guard leaders (under the stewardship of George Pataki's adjutant general, John Fenimore) saw to it that 12 pilots were fired, transferred, or assigned to career-killing jobs below their ranks.

Days after the story appeared, the one-time Boys from Syracuse took their fight to the east steps of the Capitol, where, after a press conference, 15 former unit pilots returned over 150 medals and awards that included seven Distinguished Flying Crosses for perilous sorties flown during the Gulf War. After a fruitless three years of the pilots' protests going unheard, their fight has now been joined. Reps. Gerald Solomon and Henry Hyde issued angry denunciations of the pilots' treatment, with Hyde demanding that Secretary of Defense Cohen "actively intervene" to "do justice to the victims of this embarrassing and avoidable debacle."

That intervention may come with or without Cohen's compliance. Solomon and Rep. Roscoe Bartlett have attached an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill that calls for the Defense Department's inspector general to examine the case, then to report the findings to the Senate Armed Services Committee and the House Committee on National Security. What will likely never come is a clean admission from Guard leaders that their behavior was unconscionable. After the protest, a Fenimore spokesman told the *Air Force Times*, "Any news reporter who takes the time to study the findings of the various investigations will surely conclude the disciplinary actions were justified." We did, and we don't.

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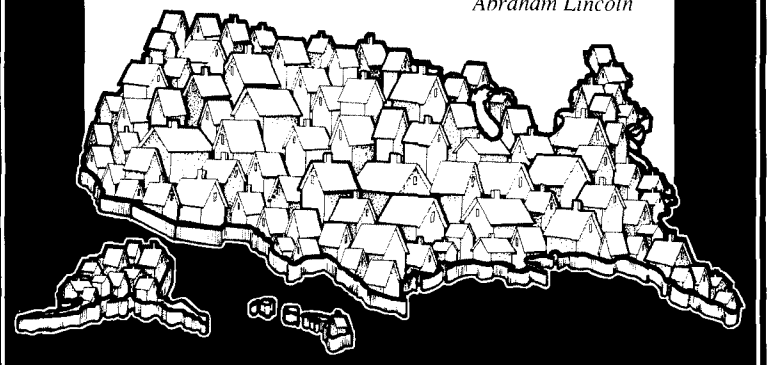
"The Strength of a Nation Lies in the Homes of its People"

Abraham Lincoln



Home ownership is a stepping stone to prosperity and stability--for families, for a nation. Abraham Lincoln, realized this when he told the American people 140 years ago: "The Strength of a Nation Lies in the Homes of its People." It's as true today as it was then. In fact, owning a home, along with steady employment and obtaining education are the main components of the "American Dream." Raising the limits on loans insured by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA loans) will make the dream of home ownership a reality for more families.

Lift the FHA Limits
Boost Home Ownership

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS
The Voice for Real Estate

NAHB
National Association of Home Builders

MBA Mortgage Bankers Association of America

One More Laugh

One modest correction concerning Michael Barone's excellent article on Barry Goldwater ("The Last Laugh," June 15).

Goldwater didn't make "the Republican party solidly internationalist, committed to waging and, in time, winning the Cold War." He didn't need to. It was that way already.

Robert Taft's 1949 vote against the NATO treaty was the last gasp of Republican isolationism, and even Taft had earlier voted for both Greek-Turkish aid and the Marshall Plan. Eisenhower's nomination and election guaranteed that an interventionist sentiment in the GOP would prevail, and Taft ratified the guarantee by dying in 1953 (assuming, which I doubt, that he had any remaining intention to oppose it).

By the early 1950s, before Goldwater attracted national notice, the nascent conservative movement was passionately anti-Communist, both domestically and internationally. In 1956 it condemned Eisenhower's inertia when Red Army tanks rolled into Budapest, and in 1959 *National Review* sponsored a protest rally at Carnegie Hall over Khrushchev's visit to the United States at Eisenhower's invitation.

It is true, however, that in 1952 Goldwater, as an Arizona delegate to the Chicago convention, voted for Eisenhower over Taft, no doubt partly because of foreign-policy issues. A great many conservatives of that day, myself included, preferred Eisenhower. But in the 1960s we worked cheerfully to oust the "moderate" leaders of the Eastern Republican establishment.

WILLIAM A. RUSHER
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

God, Man, and Swing

I was fascinated by Mark Gauvreau Judge's story on the return of swing ("Jump, Jive, and Wail," June 8). He correctly states the unstated moral code of most swing clubs. Compared with the heroin-infested rave dives associated with the urban teen scene, swing clubs are a festival of dance lessons, classy music, laid-back lounge ambience, swank attire, and a code of

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decorum that expects good behavior and good cheer.

However, I think Judge goes a bit far in suggesting that swing dancing in and of itself can re-civilize the culture. Rather, I think the swing renaissance simply reflects a deeper yearning in the hearts of today's teens and twentysomethings. After the destructive moral relativism of the baby boomers and the morosely self-absorbed, parent-hating angst of today's adolescent three-chord bands, Gen Xers are looking for the structure and the fun that swing provides. Swing dancing, while bouncy and energetic, still requires a clear leader and follower. The music has a jumpy beat that suggests good times and optimism. Furthermore, the '30s and '40s duds clearly demarcate male from female in swing clubs—an open question in many other dance clubs.

In other words, swing taps our desire for innocent fun and a workable set of rules. Civil revival must come from the Creator rekindling in people's hearts a desire for a civil society, of which swing is a part.

TRAVIS FELL
RICHARDSON, TX

BANKING ON BANKS

Irwin M. Stelzer may remember the Irving Trust Company as tiny, but it was not ("A Bank Too Large?," June 8). The Irving Trust, whose landmark 1930 skyscraper anchored the intersection of Wall Street and Broadway, was long considered a New York money-center bank in august company. Moreover, Irving didn't disappear "long ago," but in a hostile bid in the last decade.

Furthermore, Stelzer's concerns about the new Travelers behemoth are correct, but misplaced. There has been a growing stream of newly chartered banks. As long as well-run, small banks can trade at two to three times book equity, we'll see more of them. And commercial banks are not the only source of small business credit.

The real problem involves the challenge presented by huge, avowedly entrepreneurial, actively trading institutions. Issues of moral hazard and financial regulation are involved. Big, ponderous, conservative institutions rarely fail. But what is to be done when, and if, an aggressive behemoth the size of Travelers spins out of control and proves to be seriously wounded? Such issues already presented themselves with Citibank less than a decade ago. Now a new institution several times larger is emerging. What assurance is there that its managerial intelligence is commensurate with its size?

PAUL J. ISAAC
NEW YORK, NY

MICROSOFT'S MORASS

Irwin M. Stelzer may be correct in describing Joel Klein as reasonable in comparison to most Clinton attor-

neys ("Microsoft's Formidable Foe," June 15). However, his analysis of the antitrust suit against Microsoft misses the mark for several reasons that are obvious if one views the case from the consumer's perspective.

While Microsoft warrants scrutiny for some of its marketing and contracting practices, a broad-based legal assault is unwarranted.

Stelzer and Klein's argument is based on a static understanding of rapidly changing product-markets. Browsers and operating systems once were sold in separate packages, when consumer use of the Internet was in its infancy. But as Internet usage increases, it is logical for customers to value integration of these products: There is a certain elegance to browsing seamlessly from one's hard drive to file servers on the Internet. Despite Stelzer's offhand denial, the high-tech industry is unique only in that product-markets can change rapidly enough to make traditional regulatory and litigation timetables ludicrously slow. What good is antitrust action if the product in question does not exist by the time the trial has started because consumers have already welcomed an innovation with a significantly improved price/performance ratio?

Even if Stelzer had a correct understanding of the relevant product markets, trends, and power dynamics, his argument is irrelevant, because Microsoft has followed Netscape's lead in distributing browser software for free. Bundling a few megabytes of browser software (market price = $0) with a 100+ megabyte operating system on 8 gigabyte hard drives is no real burden to customers who choose to download Netscape instead of activating the browser capabilities of Windows 98.

The antitrust action is a better example of abuse of political power by Netscape, Sun, Oracle, and the like than of abuse of market power by Microsoft. Microsoft's competitors are using their relationship with Al Gore, and the fact that their home states have more congressional clout than Washington State, to impose their will on consumers.

Despite Stelzer's protestations, America already has a healthy, competitive software industry. Excessive government involvement will only weaken it, as it has many other domestic industries.

JOHN A. BECKWITH
EVANSTON, IL

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Casual

A New Nobel

Has anyone the area code for Stockholm? I need to call the Nobel Prize Committee, fast. I've got an idea. It's time they added a new prize—one that, in my view, ought to have been instituted from the beginning of the Nobel Prizes in 1901.

It's always been a bit capricious, the way the Nobel Prizes are set up. Prizes for physics and chemistry, for example, but not for mathematics, on which so many advances in physics and chemistry absolutely depend. Why a Nobel Prize in literature but none in music or visual art? Why a Nobel at all in economics, that most contentious and tendentious of subjects? And speaking of contentious and tendentious, what about the Nobel Peace Prize? When a friend of mine once asked Tom Lehrer why he no longer wrote brilliant comic songs, Lehrer told him that, ever since Henry Kissinger won the Nobel Prize, nothing seemed funny anymore.

The new prize I would like to see instituted by the Nobel Committee is one for marriage. As the Peace Prize is meant to encourage peacemaking in a war-ridden world, so might the Nobel Prize for Marriage do likewise for matrimony, an institution that, all the statistics on divorce make plain, is itself in great peril. A Nobel Prize for Marriage would have, as they say in advertising, a fine reinforcing effect.

As for the grounds on which the prize ought to be given, these, it seems to me, are fairly self-evident. The prize ought to be given for sticking it out, for perseverance, for endurance, for—to capture it in a single, if hyphenated, word—long-suffering. (Not that, in marriage, short-suffering is any picnic. Consider the first five of the six wives of Henry VIII, short-sufferers all.)

To launch the Nobel for marriage, it might be best to begin by giving out a few prizes posthumously, to great long-suffering husbands and wives of the past. Countess Tolstoy, surely, ought to be an early winner, having had to listen to all the count's utopian guff, to make sure that he didn't give away the copyrights to *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*, to compose so-called fair copies of his many novels and religious tracts, and then, at the very end, to be put to the humiliation of his publicly deserting her in the hope of dying alone.

What about Prince Albert, whose lot could not have been an easy one? Victoria, true enough, wrote gushily in her diary about her German husband, especially after his death. But I keep thinking of that famous phrase of hers, "We are not amused!" Difficult to imagine she never used it on him. Did she ever use it to devastating effect, one wonders, in the bedroom? Put the prince consort down as a Nobel contender. Then there is the marriage of the Carlyles, Thomas and Jane, of whom Tennyson said, "By any other arrangement, *four* people would have been unhappy instead of two."

Does Leonard Woolf qualify? Virginia Woolf, in her snobbery, was not above remarking on her husband's Jewishness, establishing her social superiority over him. With the most fragile of egos, she required vast attention, solicitation, endless reassurance, all of which Leonard supplied. She was, in the end, of course insane. Did Leonard know this to begin with? And, knowing it, oughtn't he, of all people, to have been afraid of Virginia Woolf? The man has to be reckoned a candidate for the prize.

I always thought that Lionel Trilling deserved a Nobel for marriage. Diana Trilling, his wife, combined neuroses with aggression. And now it turns out that we can add resentment to the mix. In her memoirs, all written after Lionel's death, Diana portrayed her husband as a depressive, a drinker, a snob, a gloom-spreader of the highest power. In the course of doing so, she would seem to have made herself out as deserving of a Nobel for marriage. But my sense is that it was Lionel and not Diana who deserved the prize.

As for the other Diana, the late princess, ought she or her husband to be up for a Nobel? Diana had Camilla and that frightful *mishpacha*, the Windsors, to deal with—no small packet of aggravation there. Charlie, though, took on himself all the problems attendant upon acquiring a younger, somewhat air-headed wife, with eating disorders, wretched taste in men, and the rest. It was a marriage made in hell, which is always rich soil for the Nobel Prize for Marriage, and therefore a tough call.

But a piece of cake, if not exactly wedding cake, next to our own first couple. Everyone now knows what Hillary has had to put up with in Bill. Not yet known is what Bill has had to put up with from Hillary, but, even discounting the charmless speculations of Dick Morris (whose own wife, surely, is another, a very strong, candidate for a prize), it cannot be minor. No, in the First Couple we have the possibility for the first shared prize: two people, each put on the earth to make the other suffer, lengthily and intensely. Impressive stuff.

Let's hear it for our laureates.

Joseph Epstein

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the weekly Standard

The Meaning of the Tobacco Victory

Republican senator John Ashcroft of Missouri remembers the momentum behind the tobacco bill last spring. Nearly everyone—that is, nearly everyone in Beltway political and media circles—insisted there was a "tidal wave" of popular support for the measure, so much that "it could not be restrained." Senate passage, Ashcroft was told, was "inevitable." Yet, alone among the 20 members of the Senate Commerce Committee, Ashcroft took a chance and voted against the bill, which was sponsored by GOP senator John McCain of Arizona, approved by Senate majority leader Trent Lott, and promoted by the Clinton White House. Later, and hesitantly, a smattering of Republicans took to the Senate floor to undercut the bill without opposing it outright. Finally last week, despite lingering fears that their action might backfire, most GOP senators joined to kill the bill.

They needn't have worried. True, the press reaction to the defeat of the McCain bill was that Republicans had put themselves in harm's way for the congressional elections this November and might even lose control of the House. We don't think so. Rather, the lesson from snuffing out the tobacco bill is that when Republicans are bold, confrontational, and conservative, they strengthen themselves politically. In other words, Republicans benefit when they act exactly the way the media, liberals, and the Washington establishment say they shouldn't. And of course there was a bonus from acting this way in the tobacco fight: Republicans blocked the most egregious piece of liberal legislation in years.

Polls bear out the rewards of GOP assertiveness. Since March, when Republicans began taking a more confrontational approach, both toward Clinton and on policy issues, two things have happened: Public approval of President Clinton has slipped, and support for congressional Republicans has grown. Take the latest national survey by the Pew Research Center, which is hardly a right-wing outfit. Clinton's standing? His approval rating fell from 71 percent in February, to 65 percent in late March, to 59 percent in the first week of June. For Republicans, the so-called generic number—Do you intend to vote for a Democrat or a Republican in this fall's election?—has turned sharply in their direction. In March, Democrats led 52-40 percent. Now it's down to 46-44 Democratic. And among likely voters, there's now a 48-44 percent Republican advantage.

Republicans have done a lot more than merely oppose the tobacco bill. Clinton, for instance, was supposed to own the education issue. Instead, Republicans rejected his education program and passed their own, without prompting a political backlash. Now the president finds himself in the perilous position of vetoing the popular education IRAs fashioned by GOP senator Paul Coverdell. On taxes, House speaker Newt Gingrich has gone from initially agreeing with Clinton to use the budget surplus to bail out Social Security to advocating a $100 billion tax cut. No backlash—indeed, Democratic senators are scrambling to show they're for cutting taxes, too. Republicans, beginning with Ashcroft and House whip Tom DeLay, have also attacked Clinton for stonewalling and lack of accountability in the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal. This was said to be a certain loser for Republicans, who'd been seen as viciously partisan in piling on a popular president. Yet the backlash hasn't come.

The sad truth is that many Republicans are scared of being conservative. What they fail to understand is that America remains a deeply conservative country. Consider the question pollster Richard Wirthlin has been asking for decades: In politics today, do you consider yourself to be a liberal or a conservative on most issues? (Wirthlin doesn't give his respondents the option of answering "moderate.") As they have for years, Americans say they are conservative. Last week's Wirthlin poll had it at 58-33, conservative over liberal.

Party identification, on the other hand, is about evenly split. That's why Republicans usually do better when the choice presented to the voters is an ideological one, conservative versus liberal, rather than a merely partisan one, Republican versus Democrat. But Republicans have a tough time understanding this. Clinton at times understands it well. This is why his greatest achievements are conservative ones: a bal-

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anced budget, welfare reform, perhaps partial privatization of Social Security next year.

We don't give congressional Republicans (except Ashcroft and DeLay) much credit for acting as they did for the right reason. It was largely the failure of their earlier strategy of cooperation—a failure manifested both in poor polls and grass-roots dissatisfaction—that prompted them to be more confrontational and conservative. When the poll numbers on tobacco legislation tanked, they moved. When James Dobson of Focus on the Family marched on Washington and demanded attention to social issues, they began taking up the agenda of social conservatives. When Gary Bauer and others leaned on them to deal with religious persecution and other human-rights abuses in China, they responded.

But however they got there, Republicans now find themselves in an enviable position. They know, or at least should know, what works politically. So the agenda for the rest of 1998 is clear: Confront Clinton and the Democrats, push conservative issues, and don't be timid. Return this year's surplus to working Americans in tax cuts or personal-investment accounts. Eliminate the marriage penalty or pass an across-the-board reduction in individual tax rates. Take up partial-birth abortion and school choice. Confront the administration on its weak China policy and its insufficient defense spending. Rewrite the proposed patient's bill of rights so it's not a backdoor step toward national health care. And keep the tobacco bill from rising again. "We're not a majority party for nothing," Ashcroft says. It's time to prove him right. ♦

Trashing Kenneth Starr

by Tucker Carlson

When James Carville first announced his plans to launch an "all out" public-relations war against independent counsel Kenneth Starr, official Washington seemed almost shocked. An attack by a president's campaign manager on a sitting independent counsel was, the *Washington Post* pointed out tartly, "unprecedented." Carville immediately drew sharp criticism from prominent Democrats and longtime friends. Democratic elder Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan dismissed Carville's anti-Starr rhetoric as "nonsense." The White House, meanwhile, worked hard to simulate official disapproval. Clinton, said spokesman Mike McCurry, was "not in a position to dissuade Mr. Carville."

That was in December 1996. A year and a half later, all pretense has disappeared. White House employees routinely go on television to denounce Ken Starr personally and by name. In a *Larry King* appearance the other day, presidential adviser Paul Begala casually described Starr's behavior as criminal, not to mention "frightening," "absurd," and "unfair." Last week a number of administration officials, including the previously restrained Mike McCurry, called for a Justice Department investigation after an overheated magazine article alleged that Starr had "leaked" grand-jury information to reporters. The White House no longer even pretends to consider Starr's investigation legitimate, and James Carville is proud to have started the trend. "Very seldom does a man have a chance to say he was a prophet," Carville says.

Carville may have been the first Clinton partisan to attack the independent counsel publicly, but it's clear that the anti-Starr propaganda machine had been under construction for some time. As early as 1995, says former Clinton confidant Dick Morris, George Stephanopoulos and other administration strategists were devising ways to discredit Starr. From the beginning, the model was the trashing of Al D'Amato, chairman of the Senate committee then looking into Whitewater. White House spinners portrayed D'Amato as out of control, a "bully" on a partisan crusade to destroy the president. The attack worked, and D'Amato's poll numbers plummeted. Years later, D'Amato, running for reelection in New York, still bears the scars. A White House aide cheerfully cites a headline that ran in the *Washington Post* just last month: "D'Amato Shows Foes He Survived Whitewater." In other words, it was D'Amato, not Clinton, who suffered politically from the Whitewater investigation.

In Starr's case, tracking polls used by the White House showed the independent counsel particularly vulnerable to charges of partisanship. It was obvious, says Morris, what to do next: "Take Starr off the pedestal as a prosecutor and make him a partisan adversary, change him from a special prosecutor into a Republican U.S. Senator, so he essentially becomes a D'Amato whom you can discount, as opposed to an Archibald Cox whom you can't." Starr's efforts to defend himself, the occasional flashes of anger during his impromptu driveway press conferences, couldn't have been more effective if they had been scripted by the White House. "By baiting him into attacking

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back," Morris says, "it created the tit-for-tat which brings him down to the level of a partisan and away from the level of an impartial investigative counsel. We used to refer to it as 'lift and loft'—lifting Clinton above the fight."

Destroying a person's reputation is messy work, and not everyone in the White House enjoyed it. "Whenever I went off the facts and into attacks on Starr, I felt very uncomfortable," says Lanny Davis, who must have spent much of his tenure as special counsel to the president feeling uncomfortable. Nevertheless, the strategy worked. By the time Monica Lewinsky became famous, Starr's approval ratings were below even D'Amato's.

Strictly speaking, poll numbers shouldn't be relevant to a criminal investigation, but in this investigation they are. Starr's unpopularity gives Clinton rhetorical cover for continuing to refuse to testify before a grand jury—Why, his supporters will ask, should the president participate in his own political lynching?—and it cannot help but weaken the independent counsel's hand as he negotiates with Monica Lewinsky's new lawyers. The target audience for the administration's attack on Starr, however, is Congress, which will receive Starr's final report on the investigation. "I'm going to be there to diminish the political impact of the report," James Carville says bluntly. "That's been my strategy from Day One. On the day Starr releases that report, the stronger the president is and the weaker he is, the better we are."

Kent Lemon

James Carville

So far, the White House seems confident that support for Starr among congressional Republicans remains shaky, particularly following Starr's disastrous interview with *Brill's Content*. Republicans, notes one Congress-watcher in the White House, "don't seem to be rushing forward to defend Starr." Nor has the Office of Independent Counsel done much to defend itself on Capitol Hill. "We're certainly not trying to lobby to shore up support," says one of Starr's deputies, who concedes that the controversy over Brill's article "won't be hastening" a report to Congress. "We're keeping communications to a minimum. Maybe that's unwise."

Maybe it is. There's no evidence yet that Starr's investigation will be used by either party as a prominent campaign issue in the fall elections. But to the extent Starr's name does surface in political races, the White House believes, it can only help the president. "The mass of America thinks it's all politics anyway," says one Clinton adviser. "If Starr becomes an issue, it makes the point more clear."

Meanwhile, as the independent counsel's report to Congress becomes imminent, expect the criticism of Starr to grow louder. "It will assume more the aspect of baiting, so that Starr gets drawn into a slugging match," says Dick Morris. When the report does appear, Morris predicts an amplified version of the usual White House reaction to damaging news: "It will be, 'It's partisan, this is what we've been expecting all along, consider its source,' that kind of stuff."

How can Starr counter what so far has been a remarkably effective spin? Lanny Davis, of all people, has some advice. "Starr's best tactic," Davis says, "would be not to reach any conclusions but simply to lay out a factual narrative with citations to evidence and specifically say, 'I'm not going to suggest to the Congress any conclusions from these facts, I'm just going to lay them out.'"

Davis has spent much of the last year and a half attacking Starr on television, so it's difficult to take his recommendation at face value. Still, it's not a bad idea. And, says Davis, the report may not even require editorial comment. "I strongly support withholding judgment about the value of that report and focusing on the evidence and facts that the report sets out," Davis says, suddenly sounding quite sober, even repentant, on the subject. "I think the temptation, which I have shared in, is to characterize the report ahead of time as a political document. The facts ultimately are going to determine the outcome here, and we ought to focus on those facts once the report is issued."

It now seems clear the report will indeed be issued, and by Ken Starr. For all the talk from the White House about how Starr is a deranged partisan who frequently breaks the law, virtually no one in Washington seems to take seriously the idea that he will be fired. In fact, Janet Reno could cancel Starr's job—though not the investigation he was hired to perform—tomorrow, and if half of what Paul Begala says is true, she should. But for the moment at least, the consensus is that she won't. "They would never do it now," says Dick Morris. "They have far too much invested in Kenneth Starr to get rid of him. They have spent so much time and energy making him into a bad guy that there's no

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way they'd want to start all over with somebody else." An attorney in Ken Starr's office agrees: "They'd rather keep us hobbled." On the other hand, he says, "however enfeebled we may be, we have the power of indictment, things like that."

It is the "things like that" that in the end may render even the best White House spin irrelevant.

Tucker Carlson is a staff writer for THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

SUING MICHAEL ISIKOFF

by Jay Nordlinger

NO JOURNALIST IS MORE TROUBLING to the Clinton White House than *Newsweek*'s Michael Isikoff. He has immersed himself in Whitewater, taken Paula Jones's claims seriously, and listened to Linda Tripp talk about an intern named Monica. Now, Isikoff is himself a target of controversy. On June 11, Julie Hiatt Steele filed suit against him in federal district court—alleging that the reporter betrayed her, defamed her, and ruined her life.

Does Steele's name ring a bell? She is an ex-confidante of Kathleen Willey, the woman who claims that the president accosted her in a room off the Oval Office. At first, Steele supported her friend's story, telling Isikoff that Willey had come to her in distress only hours after the alleged incident occurred. Later, though, Steele changed her tune, explaining to Isikoff that Willey, out of desperation and connivance, had asked her to lie.

Steele maintains that she and Isikoff agreed that their conversations would be off the record. She further insists that Isikoff's violation of this alleged agreement has cost her money, honor, and peace of mind. So she has socked him—and *Newsweek*—with a lawsuit charging nine counts of (among other offenses) breach of contract, unjust enrichment, and fraud.

Newsweek states emphatically that Isikoff has done nothing wrong. Ann McDaniel, the magazine's Washington bureau chief, says that Steele has lodged "a ridiculous complaint" and that "we have the utmost confidence" in Isikoff, who "knows the difference between off the record and on the record."

Still, no reporter likes to be sued. Isikoff will almost certainly find himself distracted as he fends off a legal attack—which will presumably be fine with the White House. Steele and her lawyers deny that they are part of a Democratic cabal, but skeptics—many of whom are in the Washington press corps—smell a rat. They suspect that Steele is being used to harass and silence a journalist who vexes the president. Willey has described her former friend, Steele, as a "pawn," deployed by the Clintonites "to discredit me." And while Steele's lawyers declare their independence from the Clinton operation, they are hardly political innocents.

On the day she filed her lawsuit, Steele testified before Kenneth Starr's grand jury. She also took the occasion to read a statement to the press—the opening shot in a public-relations offensive. "Over a year ago," she said, "I made two mistakes: I did a favor for a person I thought was my friend, and I trusted a reporter." She then addressed herself to the president: "Although I did not vote for Mr. Clinton, I want to apologize to the president and his family. I deeply regret that my mistakes were used to cause them harm, and I assure you—these are *my* words—I have not been asked to say this. Or anything else on this matter."

Steele uttered this last part apparently to quiet speculation about her motives. Her lawyers insist that she is a relatively apolitical person, a Republican if anything, who cast votes for Ronald Reagan and George Bush. One of those lawyers, John Coale—who is among the bar's most colorful figures—says that Steele filed her suit for a simple reason: "Her life has not been very nice" since Isikoff printed her name almost a year ago. She has lost her job. She has lost her earning potential. She has lost her standing in the community. She has, in short, been made "notorious."

Speaking of notorious, Steele's lawyers are worth a look. Her first was John West, from Richmond, Va., where Steele was living at the time of her encounters with Isikoff. She soon switched, however, to a Washington superlawyer, Nancy Luque. West declines to say how he came to be hired by Steele and why he ceased to represent her. Luque, too, is hesitant to discuss the circumstances of her engagement, but she does say that "my representation of Julie has nothing to do with the White House or the president's other counsel or anything else concerning politics."

Luque (pronounced "Lukey") is a fixture in the capital's legal establishment. Her clients have included the spy Jonathan Pollard and the employees of Dan Rostenkowski, the Chicago Democrat recently released from jail. Lately, Luque has represented the Clinton-Gore campaign in the fund-raising investigation, as well as Asiagate defendants Melinda Yee and

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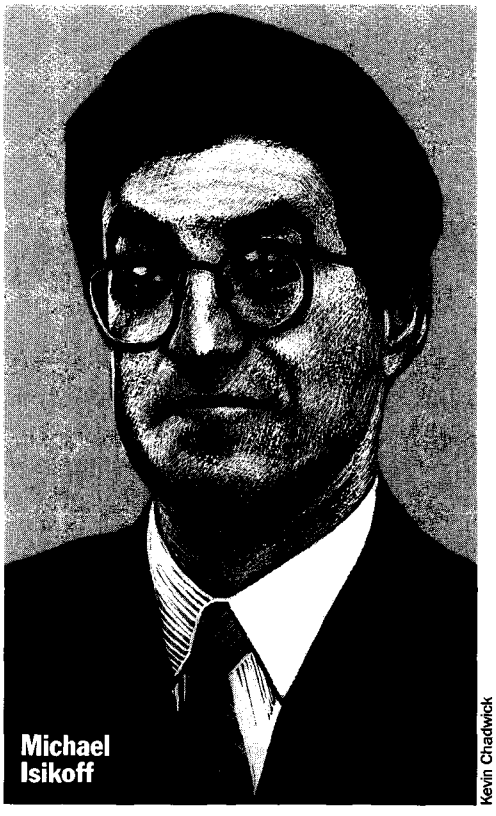
Maria Hsia (who, Luque cautioned the press, should not be viewed as "a sort of Mata Hari" of Al Gore's Buddhist temple). Is she a Democratic lawyer? Luque protests, "I do not choose clients by looking at their voter-registration cards, and the notion that I would be carrying anyone's water is insulting. I really am not a political animal—though I know no one will believe that."

Michael Madigan is one who is not quite willing to believe it. The former majority counsel to Sen. Fred Thompson's special committee, Madigan says that Luque "is an outstanding lawyer—so I'm surprised to see her in such an obviously b.s. case." Luque, for her part, states flatly that she has had no contact with the White House or its allies about either Steele's grand-jury testimony or the suit against Isikoff.


Michael Isikoff

Kevin Chadwick

While Luque is handling the grand-jury matter, John Coale has charge of the lawsuit. How did that happen? Luque, a criminal lawyer, drew up a list of plaintiff's attorneys, from which her client selected Coale. Asked to explain Steele's choice, Luque notes that "Julie is a fan of Mr. Coale's wife."

That would be Greta van Susteren, the CNN legal analyst who rose to fame during the O.J. Simpson trial. Her husband is known as the "Master of Disaster," an attorney quick to the scene of a catastrophe. In 1987, the *Washington Post*'s Style section asked, "Is John Coale really the sleaziest lawyer in America?" Coale himself has admitted to being "an ambulance chaser," a "bad boy," a "known sleazebag." He was the first American lawyer to arrive at Bhopal, India, after the Union Carbide accident. Similarly, he was present in San Juan following the horrible hotel fire of 1986. Later, he represented Lisa Marie Presley in her divorce from Michael Jackson.

In 1997, Coale had his biggest strike ever, leading the trial lawyers in their $368 billion suit against the tobacco companies. He is eager to point out that Ken Starr has toiled for the other side, presenting the independent counsel with "a raving conflict of interest." Coale is also willing to comment on certain small-fry claims: When President Clinton twisted his ankle at the golfer Greg Norman's estate, Coale suggested that the injury was "worth $850,000 minimum—add another $200,000 if the county it happened in went Democrat." Just last month, Coale and his wife were guests at a White House state dinner.

Finally—to burnish the lore—Coale received the *American Lawyer*'s Most Frivolous Suit Award for 1986. Apparently, he had filed a counterclaim against an Indian tailor who helped him line up Union Carbide clients and then demanded fees. Coale alleged that the man had done a shoddy job on nine custom-made shirts and that the ungainly fit had subjected him to "public humiliation," "severe emotional distress," and "embarrassment"—much the language that appears in Steele's complaint. (Coale later asserted that his "counterclaim" had been an elaborate ruse.)

Coale says that he investigated Steele's contentions for two months before agreeing to take her case. It will not be, he vows, a matter of "he said, she said." He says that he will demonstrate that Isikoff unlawfully deceived his client. Coale even dangles the possibility that Steele, à la Tripp, has a tape or two up her sleeve. He further boasts that he will prove that the alleged incident involving Clinton and Kathleen Willey never took place: "We're going to show that it did not happen." Coale, like Nancy Luque, states that he has never discussed Julie Steele with anyone at the White House or with any Clinton associates.

Legally, Coale intends to rely on a 1991 Supreme Court case, *Cohen* v. *Cowles Media*, which holds that the First Amendment does not protect a journalist from burning a source—that is, breaking a "contract" with someone to whom he has pledged anonymity. But Bruce Sanford, a prominent Washington media attorney, calls *Cohen* an "idiosyncratic case," whose "facts are somewhat aberrational." While *Cohen* may have "legal relevance" to the Steele-Isikoff fight, says Sanford, it has little "factual relevance," as "the difference between the two cases is enormous."

Steele v. *Isikoff* may well provide a measure of excitement. Coale told CNN's Larry King that Isikoff is "a guy, I think, who had it in for the president. He had troubles with the *Washington Post* over this very issue. That will come out in our lawsuit." Coale was

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evidently referring to Isikoff's two-week suspension from the *Washington Post* in 1994 for insubordination, following a stormy confrontation with his editors over their spiking of his work on Paula Jones. Shortly after that episode, Isikoff moved to *Newsweek* (also owned by the Washington Post Company).

Coale further charges that Isikoff slandered Steele by telling a television audience that she had attempted to peddle her story to a tabloid (though Coale concedes that Steele sold a photo of Willey with Clinton to the *National Enquirer*). Willey, too, is expected to appear as a witness in the case—and the blood between her and her onetime friend remains bad.

The various Clinton "-gates" may lack a Woodward and Bernstein, but Mike Isikoff comes close. He is straight out of the president's nightmares. Bob Woodward, who once hired Isikoff, says that the *Newsweek* reporter does "superb" work, in accordance with "the strictest standards." The "Nixonites," Woodward notes, "tried to make the reporters, rather than themselves, the issue—as had administrations before them—and obviously the same sort of thing is going on now with Mike."

Isikoff may be able to slough off this lawsuit against him, pursuing his quarry as usual. But the president and his men would no doubt enjoy seeing him knocked off his game.

Jay Nordlinger is associate editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

FOB'S LAST HURRAH?

by Matt Labash

IT IS NEVER PLEASANT WATCHING a grown man suffer the indignities of politicking. But we nevertheless gaze, transfixed, as Alabama governor Fob James works the buffet line at Niki's seafood restaurant on the outskirts of Birmingham. Fob is a skilled campaigner, joshing and cajoling and avuncular, even when he humors Alabama alumni with the "Roll Tide" chant that is blasphemy to a former All-American halfback for Auburn.

Ungainly reporters tagging behind, Fob navigates the tightly quartered tables, rattling iced-tea tumblers and poking his doughy mien over patrons' plates without so much as a hairnet between his rake-over and their fried okra.

"I'm runnin' fo' guv'nah," he interrupts, "and I sho' would appreciate yo' vote."

"You got your work cut out for you, guv,'" says one ornery diner, not knowing the half of it.

Six months ago, it was believed that James would beat Democratic lieutenant governor Don Siegelman like the family piñata, coasting to reelection as other Republican incumbent governors are expected to do this November. But while Siegelman socked away $3.5 million, the notoriously mulish James refused to raise money, or to salve the silk-stocking Republicans who've taken offense at his firebrand social conservatism, or even to declare his candidacy before the state chairman publicly denounced him.

One can hardly blame Fob—he's had a busy term. Three years ago, James raised his national profile by reprising prison chain-gangs after a 30-year hiatus. Two years ago, he took on the American Civil Liberties Union in defense of the Ten Commandments and Judge Roy Moore: He informed the heathen chiggers that if they planned on wrenching the Decalogue off Moore's courtroom wall, they'd be doing so over the brittle cadavers of the National Guard, the state troopers, and the Alabama and Auburn football teams.

Over the last year, Fob has joined with the teachers of DeKalb County who are battling a federal district court injunction against school-sponsored prayer (he's dubbed the district's court-imposed prayer monitor "the secret police"). The governor is using the DeKalb skirmish to make war on the last six decades of Supreme Court church/state rulings. Stop by his office in Montgomery, as I did last December, and you'll be treated to a 45-minute slide show on judicial usurpation and original intent.

Such extracurricular activities, of course, have made Fob aces with the Bubba vote. And he approaches rock-star status with the national Christian Right—Ralph Reed is his campaign manager. But economic conservatives in the state feel these tangential endeavors have diverted Fob's attention, not to mention reflected poorly on their New South refinement. For that and many other reasons, Fob found himself in the middle of a contentious five-candidate primary. On June 2, he just missed the requisite majority, finishing first with 48 percent. So now, in a June 30 runoff, he'll face the business community's candidate, Winton Blount III—Republican stalwart, construction/auto dealer magnate, millionaire, and son of "Red" Blount, Nixon's postmaster general.

The runoff looks to be a squeaker; Ralph Reed acknowledges that it will be close, and even the pros

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aren't laying wagers on the outcome. Complicating matters is that Alabama Republicans have open primaries, allowing Democrats to make crossover mischief in the runoff. While the Siegelman camp is feigning neutrality, Blount's campaign, with a formidable ground game and active outreach to black voters, is undoubtedly wooing Democrats.

Fob and Blount are both devoutly religious conservatives (essential in a state where even the Democrats have a "director of faith outreach"), yet they offer a total contrast in styles. Fob loves to hunt Canadian geese with his dog Elijah, a yellow lab that resides on a pillow in his office. "He's a hell of a dog—writes all my legislation," Fob says. Talk to Blount, and there's no time for levity, but he says he'll make time to "hunt for industry." At a Blount press conference, they serve vegetable trays and quiche puffs. At a Fob press conference, they serve Lay's potato chips and jelly donuts.

"Winton Blount may be *Masterpiece Theater*, but Fob James is *Hee Haw*," explains David Azbell, Fob's deputy press secretary. "And I will guaran-damn-tee yuh that the ratings for *Hee Haw* are ten times those for *Masterpiece Theater*."

By Alabama standards, this year's campaign acrimony seems mild—which is a bit like saying by Louisiana standards, the candidates seem principled. In past years, if you were running for office, opponents would disclose your homosexuality, your wife's alcoholism, and your daughter's carnal misadventures.

Chas Fagan

Fob James

Now, Blount says Fob lacks "vision" and is failing to lead. Fob says "Ms. Shirley MacLaine has visions," while he has a longstanding no-new-taxes pledge, which Blount rebuffs. Blount staffers claim voters are being telephoned by "pollsters" who speak in Ebonics and hint that Blount writes bad checks. Fob staffers meanwhile produce tapes of Blount workers engaging in negative "push polls"; and they say their "Alabama Needs More Fob!" signs are being defaced by interlopers who keep inserting "No" between "Needs" and "More." Fob calls the Blount campaign "crazy" and "cowardly." Blount calls Fob "desperate" and a "walking, talking hypocrite."

But the most heinous obloquy came when Blount resurfaced one of Fob's finest moments. (There are many to choose from. There was the time Fob enraged editorial boards by encouraging teachers to give students a "pop on the fanny" like the one he earned for blowing up a toilet with a bullfrog firecracker. Or the time he enraged editorial boards by suggesting state employees should emulate the "blinding efficiency" of the Waffle House, where he frequently dines.)

The incident in question took place in 1995, when Fob mocked evolution to the state board of education, telling them they "might ought to have a look at Genesis to get the whole story." He then bent at the waist, slumped his torso, and dragged his arms like an ape to illustrate the Darwinian absurdity. Blount, echoing the sentiments of many image-conscious Alabamians, opined that Alabama didn't need a governor "dancing around the stage like a monkey." Fob, a former barbell manufacturer, retorted, "If I dance like a monkey, then he must dance like a fat monkey. I'm a monkey that's in good shape. . . . I'm also not a monkey whose daddy has put $2.5 million in my campaign either." Lest anyone think Fob was disparaging corpulent primate scions generally, his wife Bobbie clarified the intended target, calling Blount "a big, fat sissy." (As a fine Christian woman, Bobbie later apologized. As an honest Christian man, Blount finally admitted he was "bald-headed and portly.")

Entertaining though it is, all this internecine spilling of blood and treasure is enough to give Montgomery mayor and Fob campaign chairman Emory Folmar an ulcer. Folmar, it should be noted, does not have a weak stomach. He has said his office is "no place for sissies or weaklings," and he proves it by drawing a Beretta 92F out of his desk drawer for show and tell, just in case an irate constituent overruns his lovely assistant, Ruby.

But even America's most heavily armed mayor has a bit of trouble keeping Fob on the reservation. Unable to persuade Fob to fund-raise last winter, Folmar now says the campaign will be flat broke by runoff time (though national GOP and evangelical money will be forthcoming if they win). Both Reed and Folmar have encouraged Fob to drop the school-prayer talk from his ads, reckoning that Fob has more than solidified that base. Instead, they emphasize his tax pledge, his education gains, his unimpeachable record on crime, and his surprisingly good economic record. (Blount types say Fob is a detriment to attracting industry, but Alabama leads the nation in start-up businesses and, like the rest of the country, is enjoying

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record-low unemployment. "Even a blind hog finds an acorn," retorts Blount.)

Fob has pretty much read from the same hymnal, except in April, when he filed a defiant writ of mandamus with the U.S. Supreme Court begging relief in the school-prayer case. In the same brief, he questioned the constitutionality of the court's prayer decisions by comparing them to Darius the Mede throwing an intercessory Daniel into the lion's den. It was hardly the first such Fob manifesto, but Folmar didn't find out about it until he read it in the papers.

Fob, it seems, is not the keenest listener. Even dear friends, like state senator Jabo Waggoner, say, "When he wants your opinion, he'll give it to you." Fob, in fact, has forged a career of being unpredictable and of alienating almost every constituency. A lifelong Republican, he switched parties to run for governor in then yellow-dog country, succeeding George Wallace in 1979. But he was the only Democratic governor who didn't endorse Jimmy Carter. And he took special pains to barnstorm for Reagan's economic recovery plan.

Vowing not to serve more than one term, he returned as a Republican in 1995 and was looked upon as a messiah by the "Big Mules" of Alabama business, who hoped to cap jury awards in a state known as "Tort Hell." Since the beginning of his term, Fob has sent tort-reform packages to the legislature, only to see them routinely impaled by the Don Siegelman-controlled Senate. The Senate Judiciary Committee is so trial-lawyer infested that during last session's "deliberations" on Fob's doomed tort-reform bill, a sign on the committee-room door read, "Quiet please, funeral in progress."

Establishment Republicans resent Fob's inability to work with the legislature (which he punishes by calling special sessions). And to compound the ill will, Fob appointed Jere Beasley—the state's best-known trial lawyer, who Republicans swear carries a pitchfork in his satchel—to the Auburn board of trustees. After that Fobian prank to tweak Democratic senators who wouldn't hear of any candidate but their own, Fob raised Republican ire again when he hired Beasley's law partner as his executive secretary. More recently, Fob even offended some of his fundamentalist base, saying that a "moment of silence" bill wasn't worth the "damn paper it's printed on" and won't "require sh— until you get relief from the U.S. Congress."

Fob's hijinks, along with his constitutional crusades, have seen him branded an embarrassment to the state by everybody from the *Birmingham News* to the *New York Times*'s Howell Raines. But Fob isn't worried. "I don't know who Howard Raines is," he shrugs. Nor does he seem terribly troubled that every major state paper has endorsed Blount, as has every other Republican candidate and several of his own ex-staffers.

And maybe he shouldn't be. There's one old hand who thinks Fob James will win: George Wallace. I am delivered to Wallace's Montgomery home by David Azbell, who is anxious to turn the Wallace endorsement into a press release on the principle that "if Gov. James burps, and it's a really good burp, we make sure he gets credit for being the best burper in the state of Alabama."

Like displays in a museum, the contents of Wallace's house are perfectly preserved and nearly obsolete. His couch patterns look not to have been changed since his stand in the schoolhouse door. We file past his grip'n'grin scrapbooks, his Slim Whitman albums, and the oil painting of his late wife, Lurleen, tilted against a blank wall in an unused room. Bedridden since 1996, the paralyzed Wallace has Parkinson's, in addition to which his mattress vibrates automatically to stave off bedsores. He's so hard of hearing a computer is parked by his side so inquiries can be typed. His room's aquamarine paint job would match his hospital gown, were the latter not caked with ashes from his Garcia y Vega Gran Premio habit.

It is difficult to believe this spectral specimen once exemplified a whole strain of politician endemic to the region where Fob now scarfs down waffles at a table for one. Unregenerate segregationists or feisty liberals, these populists practiced politics not as poll-tested automatons, but as entertainers who incited and amused, delivering hell-for-leather philippics in perfectly turned phrases. They were obstinate and gregarious and unpredictable and fierce, eliciting every known human response except boredom.

Though Wallace is barely able to whisper on account of fatigue, I ask him if, when Fob goes, so goes forever the breed of southern governor who was part statesman, part jester, part pugilist. Wallace looks away from his ESPN2 toward a yellowed picture of himself with a puggish snarl, when he was a Golden Gloves champ pounding the sphenoidal sinus out of some unfortunate opponent. He draws up his chin, puts down his cigar, spits a Gran Premio globule on his gown, and nods in the affirmative.

But Fob's not finished yet. Back at Niki's in Birmingham, I am seated at the governor's table as he hunches over his barbecue chicken platter. I ask Fob if he regrets the Blount/monkey crack. He looks down at his plate, swabs his chicken runoff with a biscuit, then looks up with contrition. "I called Winton a fat monkey, and I was in errah," he says, suppressing a grin. "What I should have called him was a *big* monkey."

Matt Labash is a staff writer for THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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Bill Clinton's Lap Dog

Steven Brill, Pseudo-Press Critic and White House Mouthpiece

By David Tell

There is a widespread popular bias against the use of anonymous sources in print and TV news. "If there's nothing evil or false about it," the thinking goes, "why must they whisper it in the dark?" And, predictably enough, a certain number of journalists are eager to win applause by pandering to this superstition. Media entrepreneur Steven Brill is such a man.

At the legal-affairs monthly he founded in the 1970s, the *American Lawyer*, editor Brill made himself famous for abjuring what he took to be journalism's sloppiness about sources and Truth. So ostentatious "a stickler for fairness and accuracy" was he, according to a recent, fawning profile in *U.S. News & World Report*, that Brill regularly and brutally upbraided staffers for even the smallest violations of his "higher" standards. He would send them notes like this: "Have you ever considered suicide?"

So it is no surprise that Brill's latest start-up monthly, *Brill's Content*, would be a magazine devoted to policing the honor of mainstream news outlets. And it is no surprise that Brill's much-anticipated cover story for the publication's inaugural issue would be an analysis of anonymous sources in media coverage of the sensational Monica Lewinsky scandal. And it is no surprise that Brill would brag, as he did in gossip diva Liz Smith's column on May 28, that while working on this piece, "I did not let anyone—including Ken Starr and the editors and anchors I talked with—speak with me 'off the record' or 'for background.'" And it is no surprise that when Brill's essay finally appeared last week, a 24,000-word epic titled "Pressgate," it proved to be pointedly and broadly critical of the world it surveyed.

But it is at least a little peculiar, is it not, that so much of Mr. On-the-Record-Only's opus turns out . . . well, *not* to be? It's sourced like this, over and over: "One member of the Jones team." "A Justice Department official," or "the Justice Department source," or "a Justice Department participant," all of whom—who can tell?—may be the same person. "One source at *Newsweek* in a position to know." "Another *Times* reporter." "Reporters or editors at six different news organizations." "Internal memos from inside three news organizations." "A disgusted NBC reporter." "A journalist at ABC." "Two reporters working on the story that day at rival news organizations." "One veteran *Journal* reporter." "One top *Times* editor." "One *Times* reporter."

And those are just the sources Brill acknowledges.

Brill has a theory about the Lewinsky case, buttressed by those sources. The theory is that the scandal is essentially manufactured and unreal. That it exists "all because a Linda Tripp and a Lucianne Goldberg got an intern to talk into a tapped phone about sex so they could put together a book deal." That these two women then fed the resulting surveillance to Kenneth Starr for a criminal investigation that would otherwise have been impossible. That Starr's office has ever since illegally leaked details of this investigation to the news media—"there is a lot more evidence of Starr and some of his deputies committing this felony than there is of the president or Vernon Jordan committing a felony," Brill asserts at one point. And that the Washington press corps's willing participation in such an "abuse of power" by the independent counsel means that American journalism is "an institution . . . corrupted to its core."

This is a recognizable theory. It is the theory held and advanced by Bill Clinton's implacable defense attorneys, White House aides, sundry other loyalists in and out of government—and no one else. How did Steve Brill come to join this isolated party line? "I talked to [Clinton lawyer] David Kendall once or twice," Brill has now told CBS's Bob Schieffer, "really just to get materials about the [law covering disclosure of information from current federal investigations]." Also, "in the first couple of weeks" of Brill's reporting for his "Pressgate" exposé, "I talked to two or three people in the White House." After which "I quickly

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decided that the most important aspect of this story wasn't from the White House."

So based on conversations with Clinton intimates, Brill concluded that the true Lewinsky scandal does not involve perjury, subornation of perjury, witness tampering, obstruction of justice, or the manipulation of the entire executive branch of government for the personal legal protection of a president who has refused for five months to explain his questioned behavior. The true scandal, instead, involves Lucianne Goldberg, Linda Tripp, Ken Starr, and a bunch of "corrupted" reporters—in particular, the three reporters Brill's Clintonite sources most despise and fear: *Newsweek*'s Michael Isikoff, the *Washington Post*'s Susan Schmidt, and ABC's Jackie Judd.

Might Brill's "Pressgate" readers benefit from knowing that he talked to and was influenced by folks like David Kendall? They might. And would you expect a man so journalistically pious as Steve Brill to have coughed up such information straightaway and voluntarily? You would. But nowhere in his piece's 29 pages does Brill so much as allude to the assistance of David Kendall. Ditto for chief White House Starr-basher Sidney Blumenthal, another—to date totally unacknowledged—Brill source.

This is peculiar, given the exacting procedures Brill claims always to employ. But it is only peculiar, nothing more. Steven Brill is entitled to adopt any lonely opinion he wishes, with help from anyone willing to persuade him. What he is *not* entitled to do is level grave criminal charges he cannot possibly sustain and assault the integrity of other reporters by distorting the public record. And that is what Brill's "Pressgate" does. It is fundamentally dishonest journalism.

Consider Brill's treatment of the Lewinsky affair's inception: the sequence of events by which the independent counsel's office became involved—and how *Newsweek*'s Isikoff reported those events. In 1997, Lucianne Goldberg and Linda Tripp alerted Isikoff to the existence of a sexual relationship between Tripp's friend Lewinsky and President Clinton. Isikoff quite correctly told the two women he could not publish an account of such purely private activity, and he declined to listen to Tripp's secret, corroborating recordings of Lewinsky. "Pressgate" makes this decision sound vaguely sinister. Brill introduces Isikoff as a "whiny," "awkward," "nervous" man, a relentless and obsessive news-industry "version of Columbo." Isikoff refused to hear the Lewinsky tapes that initial evening, according to Brill, in part because "he was in a hurry to get to CNBC, where he was a paid Clinton sex scandal pundit."

A nasty gibe, this last part. And a false one. Isikoff has never been employed by CNBC; his contract is with a different network, MSNBC—where, at the time, October of last year, no Clinton sex scandal was current and the only televised commentary concerned Democratic campaign-finance improprieties and Johnny Chung.

But that is the least of Brill's mistakes. By January 13, 1998, Tripp and Lewinsky had been subpoenaed in the Paula Jones case; White House staffers and Clinton friend Vernon Jordan were attempting to secure Lewinsky a job in New York; Lewinsky had been induced to sign an affidavit denying her affair with the president; someone had drafted "talking points" instructing Tripp to change her memory about alleged Clinton harrassee Kathleen Willey; Tripp had contacted the independent counsel's office; and Ken Starr's office had wired Tripp for a sting on Lewinsky. This certainly qualified as news. Isikoff learned much of it on January 14. He phoned Starr deputy Jackie Bennett on January 15.

And then what? Steve Brill reports that "Isikoff says" Bennett asked him to hold off reporting the story until Starr could flip Lewinsky as a cooperating witness—and persuade the intern to wear her own body wire designed to capture "Jordan and maybe even the president on tape obstructing justice." Brill further reports that "Isikoff says" he agreed, on condition he later be given a full briefing on the results of any future sting.

It seems odd that Isikoff would suddenly reveal to *Brill's Content* that Kenneth Starr once intended to "get" Bill Clinton in this dramatic fashion, especially since Isikoff has never reported any such episode in his own magazine. So *did* Isikoff tell Brill about a possible Clinton/Jordan sting scheme? No, "of course not," Isikoff says. What's more, he continues, "I don't believe it's true" that Starr ever seriously considered the idea. Last week, in a comprehensive 19-page response to "Pressgate," the Office of Independent Counsel categorically asserted that "we had no such plans." Brill appears to have made the whole thing up. And put it in Michael Isikoff's mouth.

And there is still more to Steve Brill's thoroughgoing revision of the events of January 15. That afternoon, Brill has Jackie Bennett and other Starr assistants approaching deputy attorney general Eric Holder for an expansion of authority to investigate the Lewinsky matter. He reports that they described their own sting-tape of Lewinsky and Tripp—but that "no tapes were played at the meeting." Brill also alleges that Bennett "failed to mention" to his Justice Department audience "what he knew from the earlier Tripp

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tapes"—that Jordan had begun offering Lewinsky job-search assistance "at least a month before" the intern received her Paula Jones subpoena.

All of which conveys the clear impression that the independent counsel's office deliberately withheld exculpatory evidence from Justice officials and thus hoodwinked the department into green-lighting a Lewinsky investigation based on sketchy, verbal assurances alone. This is a multiple falsehood.

It is true that "no tapes were played" at this meeting. But it is also true that the independent counsel's sting tape was *definitely* played at two subsequent meetings over the next 24 hours—a fact Brill never reports. It is true that Bennett "failed to mention" any information contained in Linda Tripp's pre-Starr tapes of Monica. But it is also true that Bennett couldn't possibly have mentioned such information, because on January 15, no one in Starr's office had yet listened to even a minute of Tripp's private tapes—another fact Brill never reports.

Steven Brill

And it is true that Vernon Jordan started looking for New York employment on Lewinsky's behalf many weeks before she got her subpoena, which might make his efforts seem harmless. But it is also true that Jordan's Lewinsky rescue mission began at almost exactly the same time Linda Tripp received *her* subpoena, the first week of October 1997. At that point, the White House already had good reason to worry over Tripp's testimony. Clinton's aides knew Tripp was politically unreliable; she had long since publicly confirmed the Kathleen Willey groping incident. And Clinton's aides knew Tripp was intimate with Lewinsky. They had every incentive to hustle the intern out of town. "Pressgate" nowhere explains this obvious point—or the equally obvious likelihood that an obstruction of justice was well underway months before Bill Clinton testified under oath in the Paula Jones trial.

Brill's highly deceptive account of January 15 is necessary to sustain his theory's central contentions: that an independent-counsel investigation of the Monica Lewinsky scandal was instituted on nothing more than Ken Starr's untrustworthy say-so; that damaging allegations about the president in the follow-up reporting of journalists like Michael Isikoff must therefore all be the products of illegal "leaks" by the independent counsel's office; and that by accepting on faith and re-reporting such allegations, the American news media have participated in an abuse of power and libeled Bill Clinton.

Watch what Brill does to Isikoff's initial published dispatches on Monica Lewinsky. *Newsweek* staffers, including Isikoff, first listened to some of Linda Tripp's private Lewinsky tapes in the early-morning hours of Saturday, January 17. The magazine did not run a story on these tapes and associated developments in its next print edition—in part because the recordings Isikoff and his colleagues heard were ambiguous about whether Clinton and/or Jordan had encouraged Lewinsky to lie, and in part because Starr's deputies were still begging *Newsweek* to hold off, pending negotiations with Lewinsky's new attorney, William Ginsburg. *Newsweek* lost its exclusive as a consequence of this decision; the story broke elsewhere on January 21.

But Isikoff's special report the evening of the 21st, posted on *Newsweek*'s computer site on America Online, was the day's best and most complete. "Pressgate" scores Isikoff for having irresponsibly juiced this rushed story to make it appear his evidence was more damning to the president than it actually was; Isikoff did not quote a section of the Tripp tapes where Lewinsky answers "no" when Tripp asks whether the president knows the young woman is going to lie in her Jones deposition. Brill is here deliberately unfair to Isikoff. He neglects to tell his readers something important: The *Newsweek* special report prominently stated that the magazine could not definitively conclude, from its review of selected pre-Starr Tripp tapes, that Clinton or Jordan had attempted to suborn Lewinsky's perjury. Brill also neglects to tell his readers about something else contained in the *Newsweek* special—an exchange that almost immediately follows Lewinsky's "no" answer on the Tripp tapes:

TRIPP: *Jesus, well, does he think you're going to tell the truth?*

LEWINSKY: *No . . . Oh, Jesus.*

Nor does "Pressgate" acknowledge that this entire section of the tape would shortly be published in a regular edition of *Newsweek*, along with a fresh report in

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which Isikoff revealed that the January 13, Starr-authorized Tripp body wire apparently confirmed the existence of a bald-faced deal: Lewinsky would deny in court any sexual contact with Clinton—but not until Vernon Jordan got her a job. What does Steve Brill make of this devastating disclosure? Only that it must be an illegal leak from Kenneth Starr's henchmen, whom Brill again pretends are the only people who have any notion what is on the relevant recording. Isikoff has since gone out of his way to repudiate this basic "Pressgate" fantasy. *Newsweek's* source on the body-wire tape was "outside of Starr's office," he told a PBS interviewer last Monday. "We reported on that tape without any help from Starr's office whatsoever."

Brill deals with Isikoff's principal print-media competitor, Susan Schmidt of the *Washington Post*, in considerably less detail—but just as dishonestly. Schmidt, "Pressgate" sneers, "does stenography for the prosecutors." Brill quotes her telling him that the *Post*'s first Lewinsky story, on January 21, was prompted by something she'd heard "from sources in Starr's office" the previous Friday "about Vernon Jordan and coaching a witness." Another illegal leak, in other words. Except that Schmidt has now ferociously denied saying any such thing to Brill, and she has also denied that her tip came "from anyone in Starr's office." *Post* editors, Schmidt insists, know the identity of her source. And those editors back her up.

Schmidt's January 24 *Post* account of what actually happened after FBI agents finally confronted Lewinsky at the Arlington Ritz-Carlton was, according to "Pressgate," another obvious "leak" from Starr, this time in "clear violation of Justice Department guidelines and the lawyer's code of professional responsibility." This is Brill at his weirdest. Just the day before, Starr had issued a press release responding to William Ginsburg's broadcast complaint that Lewinsky had been detained against her will. Schmidt's report, for the most part, was written off the press release. Some leak.

Finally, Brill quibbles with Sue Schmidt's February 11 treatment of retired Secret Service agent Lewis Fox, who had recently claimed to have seen Clinton and Lewinsky alone together in the Oval Office during the fall of 1995. What was the point of this story, Brill asked Schmidt in one of his "Pressgate" interviews? Well, he says she responded, Clinton testified under oath that he'd *never* been alone with the intern, so Lewis Fox's account "makes him a liar." Wrong, Brill immediately announces triumphantly. When the president's Paula Jones deposition was eventually made public, it would turn out that "Clinton did not testify that he was never alone with Lewinsky."

Wrong yourself, buddy. In the first place, Schmidt denies ever calling Clinton a "liar." Brill says the word is in his notes—and having read this far, which of them do *you* believe? More important, it simply isn't true that Clinton's deposition included an admission that Lewinsky and the president were ever alone together. Clinton offered a classically Clintonesque "I don't recall" when Jones's attorneys asked him about this possibility. But Clinton also took pains to suggest that if he ever had indeed been alone with the young lady, it was only momentarily—when she delivered him some piece of paper or a pizza. He was never *really* alone with her, in other words.

Steve Brill knows his gotcha of Sue Schmidt on this deposition is bogus. He concedes as much, implicitly, elsewhere in "Pressgate," when he celebrates the blockbuster February 6 *New York Times* account of what Clinton secretary Betty Currie had told unspecified "investigators." This *Times* story, Brill gushes, is the one piece of print journalism whose facts "no one has disputed." And what was the biggest fact in the Betty Currie *Times* report? Brill never mentions it. That fact was this: The president summoned Currie to the Oval Office the day after he was deposed in the Jones suit, went over his testimony with her point by point, and reminded her that "We were never alone, right?"

Brill dismisses ABC's Jackie Judd, the most consistently aggressive and enterprising of network-television Lewinsky investigators, as someone whose "every utterance is infected with the clear assumption that the president is guilty." She is a patsy for Ken Starr, he claims, one of those reporters prepared to "believe almost anything the prosecutors tell them." In fact, every Judd exclusive that "Pressgate" analyzes was derived, *according to Brill himself*, from sources *not* associated with the independent counsel's office. Brill says, for example, that Judd's account of a soiled Lewinsky dress was fed to ABC by Lucianne Goldberg. (Judd cautions THE WEEKLY STANDARD that she is "uncomfortable discussing who our sources *aren't*." But she will say this much: "The people we use as sources are people we have some relationship with. I have spoken to Lucianne Goldberg once on the phone—for 30 to 45 seconds. I have run into her in person once, in a Washington jewelry store, where we recognized each other and said hello. Okay?")

Okay. Enough already. We could go on like this forever: illogic, innuendo, inventions, disputed quotations . . . "Pressgate" is a mess. Brill never comes close to proving a single genuine "leak" by Starr. And none of what Brill *purports* to prove, despite the care-

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"WEATHER REPORT"

"Somehow," the President thought to himself, "the weather report might well be the harbinger of how the political elements might turn out for me." He remembered how it went for General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Ike asked for and got the right forecast for the Normandy invasion on D Day, June 6, 1944. It made all the difference.

So the President dialed the weatherman for the Joint Chief of Staff consistent with the precedent set by Ike years before. "Give me your long range weather report," he commanded the climatologist, thinking to himself, "As the weather goes, the same will go for me."

"Mr. President," began the expert, "I see a gathering storm, dark clouds, unseasonable cold. I predict inclement weather over an extended period."

"How long? How inclement?"

"Of indeterminate length, severe storms, high winds, rough seas, low visibility, curtailed air travel, flooding. In a word, a mess!"

"Thank you," Said the President, reaching over the partner next to him to hang up the telephone in the famous White House Lincoln bedroom. "Good night," he whispered to his guest.

"Good night, Mr. President," his companion for the night replied.

The President closed his eyes. He fell asleep. He dreamed of the weatherman and what he said. It was the same meteorologist but with a different forecast.

"Let me hear your prediction again," the President asked.

"Sir, there's a big blow brewing. I hear thunder from the frustrated media. I see lightning flashes from a nearby 'Starr.' I feel the stabbing polar winds come to lash you from a disillusioned public. You're on a stage alone with the whole world looking on.

"Go on."

"The wind scatters the merciful mist which, up to now, obscured the eye of the storm. But now, in a manner of speaking, you're standing there as naked as on the day you were born," the weatherman told him.

"What do you hear?"

"Thunderclaps, Mr. President. Webster Hubbell calling out to you in fear and trembling. Vincent Foster advising you. Monica enticing you. Gennifer exciting you. Vernon Jordan warning you. Jim McDougal threatening you. It's all as clear as the sound of the hunter's horn coming from an open field on a crisp autumn afternoon."

"What else?"

"Lightning flashes play upon a blizzard of tapes. Like streamers, they dangle in profusion drifting down to Earth. On each of them, there is addressed to you, for all the world to see, embarrassing confidences. Whispered scandal supplied the sound which is the rolling thunder of audible truth."

"That's all?"

"Not quite. Mr. Gore rides out the storm you left behind. Tipper now is first. Hillary doesn't even count. You retire, snug and safe, to a cunning cottage that isn't white, tucked away in some remote corner of Arkansas."

"It's an ill wind that doesn't blow some good," replied the President. "I got out on my own, nobody fired me, did they?"

"That's right, sir. You're correct in what you just said about the wind," the weatherman comforted the President.

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lessness with which he floats the word "felony," even remotely constitutes an "illegal" violation of grand-jury secrecy. Half the "leaks" occurred before the Lewinsky grand jury was ever called to session. And the federal appeals court ruling on which Brill rests his outrageous criminal allegations against the independent counsel was not released until nearly three months *after* the last of these "leaks" was made.

Needless to say, Ken Starr was foolish to grant Steven Brill an interview for "Pressgate." Had Starr avoided Brill, the ensuing controversy would have been impossible. But Starr cooperated and gave Brill the opportunity to recycle the White House party line in the guise of press criticism. Instead of "Pressgate," we have "Brillgate." Which raises the only meaningful question: Has Steven Brill ever considered suicide? ♦

CNN AND *TIME*'S POISONOUS SMEAR

No, the U.S. Did Not Drop Nerve Gas on a Laotian Village

By Eric Felten

Two weeks ago, some of the biggest guns in American journalism made a horrifying accusation: A U.S. Special Forces unit in September 1970 had cold-bloodedly dropped lethal nerve gas on civilians in Laos while on a mission to assassinate American defectors thought to be in the village. This blockbuster story kicked off a new program called *NewsStand: CNN & Time*, a joint venture of the cable network and the newsweekly, which are corporate siblings in Ted Turner's media empire. CNN's Bernard Shaw and Jeff Greenfield anchored the broadcast, and the story was simultaneously published in *Time* magazine, under the bylines of CNN's Peter Arnett and April Oliver, who had done the reporting.

All of these parties, it is now clear, bear some responsibility for maligning the reputations of the U.S. military and of the soldiers who took part in the commando raid into Laos known as "Operation Tailwind." There is in fact no plausible evidence to support the allegation of nerve-gas use—which Oliver has called a possible "war crime." CNN's longtime top military expert, Air Force major general Perry Smith, quit the network, after a follow-up broadcast of *NewsStand: CNN & Time* on June 14 stood behind the original reporting. Smith called the story "sleazy journalism." Editors and reporters at *Time* have been speaking off the record about their unhappiness at having published the article.

Eric Felten, a Washington writer, last wrote for THE WEEKLY STANDARD *about the NAACP and Merriam-Webster's.*

It's not hard to see why they would be unhappy. There *was* an Operation Tailwind in Laos, but it was not an assassination mission. It was a diversion intended to distract North Vietnamese troops from a CIA operation miles away. The mission *did* involve dropping gas on enemy soldiers, but it was garden-variety CS tear gas, not deadly sarin nerve gas. Oliver and Arnett should have known this. They gathered evidence during their reporting that the story wasn't plausible—and that their main witness wasn't reliable. When the Washington bureau of *Time* read the article that was about to be published, they were mortified, according to one *Time* reporter, because of the obvious holes in the story. But the only concession they extracted from the magazine's top editors in New York was a headline with a question mark, "Did the U.S. Drop Nerve Gas?" The answer, it turns out, is no.

NewsStand: CNN & Time brags that its report, "Valley of Death," was based on an eight-month investigation in which everyone from the soldiers on the ground to the top brass was interviewed—200 sources in all. What it hasn't done is break down those numbers and tell how many of those sources believe the tale that was broadcast. Here are accounts of how the CNN reporters supposedly got "confirmation" from key sources.

• **Adm. Thomas Moorer**. The highest-ranking military source named was Moorer, who had been chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1970. According to Arnett, "Moorer confirmed that nerve gas was used in Tailwind," but he didn't say so on camera. On

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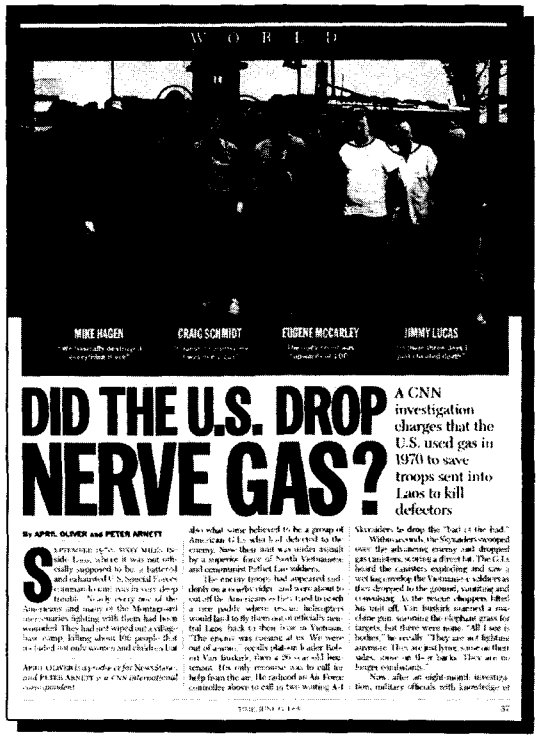
the air, Moorer's clearest statement was, "I would be willing to use any weapon and any tactic to save the lives of American soldiers." After the broadcast, Moorer told Reuters and *Newsweek* that he had never confirmed the use of sarin to CNN and had no knowledge that nerve gas was ever used during the Vietnam war. For its June 14 follow-up, *NewsStand: CNN & Time* reinterviewed Moorer and was unable to get the "confirmation" it once claimed. Moorer said he had no knowledge of sarin use, although later, "in general discussions," he had heard "verbal statements indicating the use of sarin on the Tailwind mission." (This is a vague enough assertion to encompass his interviews with CNN, during which he no doubt heard precisely such "verbal statements.") A friend of Moorer's says of the original broadcast, "The admiral got mixed up. He's 87 years old; he's in a nursing home; they interrogated him for hours."



W O R L D

MIKE HAGEN — CRAIG SCHMIDT — EUGENE MCCARLEY — JIMMY LUCAS

DID THE U.S. DROP NERVE GAS?

A CNN investigation charges that the U.S. used gas in 1970 to save troops sent into Laos to kill defectors

By APRIL OLIVER and PETER ARNETT

• **Eugene McCarley.** Moorer was only the first source to back down from the allegations attributed to him. Eugene McCarley, the Army captain who led Operation Tailwind on the ground, is livid at the way his quotes were cut and pasted by CNN to make him appear to say things that are the exact opposite of what he said. "I don't know how the newspeople get away with it," he says.

"April Oliver called me and said that she wanted to do a story on Tailwind because she had learned about the amazing heroism of the men, their great bravery and the miraculous escape," McCarley says. "But when she showed up it was all *gas, gas, gas*." McCarley says he sat through an on-camera interview that lasted for six hours. "I told her a thousand times that poison gas was not used. I told them over and over that it's just preposterous." Frustrated that McCarley kept denying any gas had been used, Oliver asked how he could possibly know that nerve gas had never been used in Vietnam. McCarley told Oliver that for all he knew "they might have had some of these gases available," a reasonable caveat. Then he went on to repeat that whether or not a nerve agent was in the Air Force arsenal somewhere, he had not used it in Tailwind or any other mission—and would never have even thought to ask for it.

Here's how the interview with the captain was played by *NewsStand: CNN & Time*: McCarley "suggested that lethal gas was always an option," said Arnett. Then came a snippet from McCarley: "They might have had some of these other gases available or standing by with the Air Force. But as I understand it, these gases, these lethal gases, are an Air Force ordnance in their arsenal."

• **Art Bishop.** The Air Force pilot who actually dropped the gas in question, Art Bishop, was interviewed for more than an hour by Oliver. He told her repeatedly that it was tear gas that he dropped on the landing zone. Bishop kept a journal while in Vietnam, in which he described that day's mission—even down to the detail that his plane was loaded with tear-gas cluster bombs. Bishop showed Oliver the journal—but she was unimpressed. "She told me, 'We have a document saying nerve gas was used,'" Bishop says. But Bishop refused to change his story. CNN didn't use any of Bishop's interview on the air. Instead, Arnett used the fact of Bishop's denial as an indication of a conspiracy to keep the use of nerve gas secret. "Even a pilot who dropped gas to get the commandos out said he was briefed it was just tear gas," Arnett said darkly. Tom Marzullo, another Special Forces veteran who was interviewed but whose comments were not used in the final story, describes an experience like Bishop's: "April Oliver told me she had documents that absolutely proved that nerve gas was used in Laos." When Marzullo asked to see the documents, Oliver changed the subject, he says. Oliver's insistence that she had documentary proof may explain why several other soldiers said on camera that they are now convinced nerve gas was used. According to a spokesman, CNN won't release these documents or unaired interviews, which it considers "work product" and would therefore never divulge.

• **Gen. John Singlaub.** According to Arnett and Oliver, no less a figure than retired major general John

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Singlaub, a commander of the Special Forces in Vietnam, confirmed the mission to kill American defectors. Singlaub is quoted in a way that makes it appear he is discussing Operation Tailwind. But Singlaub was never interviewed by Oliver or Arnett for the Tailwind story. Oliver interviewed Singlaub a year ago for a different CNN broadcast involving different accusations of nefarious commando actions. Arnett and Oliver took quotes from that story and pasted them into the "Valley of Death" story.

•**Robert Van Buskirk**. The key source for the *NewsStand: CNN & Time* allegations is Robert Van Buskirk, a lieutenant who led one of three platoons in the Tailwind mission. It is Van Buskirk who claims to have killed two Caucasians he believed to be deserters; it is Van Buskirk who says Laotian mercenaries found "beaucoup roundeyes" in the tunnels of the camp they destroyed; it is Van Buskirk who says it was "pretty well understood that if you came across a defector . . . under any circumstances, kill them." It is Van Buskirk who claims to have personally ordered the air strike with "sleeping gas" (which Van Buskirk says "was slang for nerve gas"); and it is Van Buskirk who describes seeing North Vietnamese troops wiped out by that gas. Without Van Buskirk, *NewsStand: CNN & Time* would not have had its story—and that's not just because his claims are the backbone of CNN's report. Had it not been for a book written by Van Buskirk, titled *Tailwind: A True Story*, April Oliver likely wouldn't have been working on the story in the first place.

defecates, kill it," says Van Buskirk. In keep-

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED Lieut. Van Buskirk back in Vietnam after Operation Tailwind

ing with the compartmentalization of infor-

Van Buskirk's "trophy" can be seen on his hat in this photo in Time.

"Oh, I'd say about seven months ago I got a call one day from April Oliver," says Van Buskirk, reached at his farm on the Broad River in North Carolina. "I wrote the book *Tailwind* in '83, and somebody got her a copy of the book." Van Buskirk's memoir was published by a small, evangelical Christian imprint, Word Books. It is the story not only of the mission in Laos, but also of Van Buskirk's epiphany. After leaving Vietnam, Van Buskirk was assigned to an Army base in Germany, where he was arrested for trafficking in guns with terrorists. It was the end of Van Buskirk's Army career, but the beginning of a new life: He had an Easter Sunday vision of Christ in a German jail cell in 1974.

The book *Tailwind* may have been the starting point for Oliver and Arnett's sarin-gas opus, but strangely it was never mentioned in the CNN broadcast. Actually, it's not strange at all: CNN never mentioned Van Buskirk's book because the author's written version of the facts contradicts his on-camera claims. And Oliver and Arnett needed those on-camera claims—without them, they would have had no grounds to claim that nerve gas was used. So, for the purposes of the "Valley of Death" broadcast, Arnett and Oliver ignored the account in Van Buskirk's book.

In *Time's* version of the nerve-gas story, (which includes material not in the CNN broadcast), Arnett and Oliver describe how Van Buskirk killed two American defectors while attacking a Vietnamese base camp:

> Suddenly Van Buskirk spotted two "longshadows," a name for taller Caucasians. One was sliding down a "spider hole" into the underground-tunnel system beneath the camp. The other was running toward it. "Early 20s. Blond hair. Looks like he was running off a beach in California," remembers Van Buskirk. "Needs a haircut. This is a G.I. Boots on. Not a prisoner. No shackles. Nothing." The lieutenant gave chase but just missed the blond man as he slipped into the tunnel. He shouted down the hole, identifying himself and offering to take the man home. "F— you," came the reply. "No, it's f— you," answered Van Buskirk as he dropped in a white phosphorus grenade, presumably killing both longshadows.

It's a vivid tale—and it appeared nowhere in Van Buskirk's book. Writing in 1983, he described in detail the attack on a North Vietnamese base camp in Laos. He described the carnage as he ran out from the jungle and into the enemy officers' mess hut, spraying them with machine-gun fire while they ate. He even described tearing the star-studded insignia off the dead regimental commander, which he took as a trophy and put on his jungle hat (this can be seen in the picture of Van Buskirk that accompanied the *Time* story). But he has nothing to say about any Americans or Caucasians in the camp, let alone anything about burning them alive with a white-phosphorus grenade.

Van Buskirk has an explanation for the discrepancy—actually, two explanations. "When I wrote the book, I wanted women and children to read the book without being grossed out," he says. (Never mind that at the front of his book, Van Buskirk provided this guarantee: "Because the last thing I wanted to do was

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hurt or embarrass anyone, I decided to change some names. That is the one liberty I took with the facts. Otherwise, this book is, to the best of my memory, a true account of what took place.") Then he offers this rather more trendy explanation: "I had pretty well suppressed the memory." He says he was haunted for years. "I saw the blond guy's face every night." It was only when Van Buskirk converted to Christianity that the nightmares went away: "I saw a new face." Van Buskirk says he didn't remember a thing about killing the defectors until he was talking to CNN, when the interviews helped him recover the memory.

Until the CNN interviews, Van Buskirk had also forgotten about the nerve-gas attack, though his book offered an intricately detailed account in all other respects. And it contradicts CNN's and *Time*'s version of events.

Arnett and Oliver write that, while trying to get to the rice paddy where the helicopters were landing to pick them up, the Special Forces team was nearly cut off by advancing enemy troops. According to their account, Van Buskirk's "only recourse was to call for help from the air. He radioed an Air Force controller above to call in two waiting A-1 Skyraiders to drop the 'bad of the bad.'" In other words, a trapped Van Buskirk called in a nerve-gas air strike.

That isn't how Van Buskirk described it in his book. "We called for air support, but the request soon had to be withdrawn because we [and the enemy] were literally at each other's throats," Van Buskirk wrote. "Then somebody upstairs had a bright idea—drop gas. We were equipped with gas masks, he must have reasoned, and the gas would keep everyone busy until we were lifted out." What kind of gas was it? It all depends whether you listen to Van Buskirk now, or read his book.

Here is how Arnett and Oliver tell it:

> Within seconds, the Skyraiders swooped over the advancing enemy and dropped gas canisters, scoring a direct hit. The G.I.s heard the canisters exploding and saw a wet fog envelop the Vietnamese soldiers as they dropped to the ground, vomiting and convulsing. As the rescue choppers lifted his unit off, Van Buskirk manned a machine gun, scanning the elephant grass for targets, but there were none. "All I see is bodies," he recalls. "They are not fighting anymore. They are just lying, some on their sides, some on their backs. They are no longer combatants."

This description of events is the heart of CNN's claim that deadly sarin nerve gas was used that day. The Vietnamese were hit with an invisible gas that made them vomit, fall to the ground convulsing, and then die—unmistakable symptoms, according to CNN, of exposure to sarin nerve gas. Without this description of the enemy's symptoms, Arnett and Oliver had no story. Which is probably why they didn't present Van Buskirk's written account of what happened when the planes dropped their gas bombs:

> What confusion! About half of our guys, I'd estimate, had thrown theirs [gas masks] away or were carrying faulty masks. Mine was punctured by bullet holes or shrapnel which rendered it worthless. At first I tried to put it on while running, but it didn't do any good so I tossed it aside. Whereupon I immediately became sick. The gas was a nauseous kind, and I soon found myself wandering among dozens of other vomiting soldiers. They were friend and foe. When one is bent over sick, it's hard to distinguish one from the other.
>
> Finally, the sound of the first chopper could be heard to my left. I couldn't see it for the gas fog and the tears that filled my eyes.

Then, according to his book, Van Buskirk and his men made it to the helicopter:

> "Okay, go!" I shouted, and with that we lifted off. Once airborne we took fire from every direction. The effects of the gas were wearing off, and the enemy opened fire on the rising choppers. Big 50-caliber machine gun bullets were chasing us, and many rounds tore into the birds. A young Marine door gunner standing next to me answered with his machine gun until he took a bullet in the neck. He grabbed his wound and fell backwards into the laps of our guys. While they tended to him, I moved forward and began squeezing off rounds in his place, firing wildly into the elephant grass below. I couldn't see who was shooting at us, but there was someone down there.

Let's compare. First, those aspects of the story that are shared by both accounts: In the CNN broadcast and in his book, Van Buskirk describes breathing enough gas that he was throwing up. In the CNN broadcast and in the book the soldiers get on helicopters and escape. Otherwise, the stories are radically different. Van Buskirk's book said the gas was so thick and opaque that he couldn't see where the helicopters were coming from; Arnett and Oliver report that the gas was nearly invisible. Van Buskirk wrote that the gas wore off, the Vietnamese recovered, and the helicopters came under heavy fire; CNN reports that Van Buskirk flew out in an eerie quiet, the Vietnamese guns silenced because the troops were all lying dead in the field. The two versions can't possibly both be true.

If it is Van Buskirk's written version that is true, the symptoms described—vomiting, choking, and tearing—are perfectly consistent with exposure to CS tear gas. Arnett and Oliver made much ado about the

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vomiting reported by Van Buskirk and other soldiers, claiming that vomiting is not a symptom of tear-gas exposure. But it is. One of the nation's most respected experts in chemical agents, Dr. Frederick Sidell, confirms this. And no doubt millions of American veterans can attest to the same effect, from their forced exposure to tear gas in one of the classic boot-camp rites of passage, a "confidence-building" exercise that leaves gassed recruits weeping and heaving.

CNN had an obligation, at the very least, to warn its viewers about Van Buskirk's remarkable change of stories. The fact that it did not demonstrates Arnett and Oliver's fundamental dishonesty in "Valley of Death." CNN's report is also demonstrably false on scientific grounds. And there is evidence Arnett and Oliver had good reason to *know* it was false.

In the CNN broadcast, the symptoms of exposure to the gas used in the attack were described as follows: "vomiting, convulsing, and falling quickly to the ground unconscious." These purported facts are ambiguous: Tear gas doesn't ordinarily leave its victims unconscious. But they come nowhere close to fitting the nerve-gas theory. The vomiting is the key to the puzzle. Though retching is indeed a side-effect of sarin exposure, it occurs only under certain circumstances, depending on how the victim is exposed and whether the nerve agent is vaporized or in its liquid state.

According to Dr. Sidell's essay in the 1996 textbook *Chemical Warfare Agents*, vomiting does not occur when sarin vapor is inhaled. Instead, vomiting occurs primarily when liquid sarin has been absorbed through the skin. The problem for CNN's account is that, while inhalation of sarin may produce nearly instantaneous effects, absorption of sarin through the skin takes time. Liquid sarin on the skin usually causes vomiting an hour or two after exposure. The delay can be as long as 18 hours and no shorter than 30 minutes. In other words, though vomiting can be an effect of sarin exposure, the *immediate* onset of vomiting is not. By contrast, immediate vomiting *is* a common effect of tear-gas exposure when the gas is in high concentrations.

There is only one circumstance under which immediate vomiting is associated with sarin, and that is when the vaporized chemical comes in contact with unprotected eyes. Indeed, the most common physical consequence of sarin exposure is a condition called miosis—an excessive contraction of the pupils. When terrorists released sarin gas in the Tokyo subway in 1995, some 98 percent of those exposed suffered from miosis. With miosis, the pupil contracts; the nerves in the eye are dulled; eyesight becomes blurry; there is usually pain in the eyes. The condition—if not treated with atropine eye-drops—can persist for days. Most of those in the Tokyo subway had minimal exposure to the gas and yet suffered from miosis, which can be caused by as little as 1/100 of a lethal dose of sarin. If the concentration is great, miosis is severe and disorienting—and can lead to vomiting.

CNN claims sarin gas was used in Operation Tailwind, and yet Arnett and Oliver provide no account of any of the gas-exposed soldiers' suffering from miosis. Had their exposure been great enough to cause vomiting, their miosis would have been so severe it would have lasted for days—and would have been obvious to any observer. Asked about his eyes, Van Buskirk says with confidence that he never suffered a thing: When the gas hit, "I covered everything but my eyes." The gas "didn't bother my eyes. I was able to see and shoot. I made it to the chopper and could see to shoot the gun." Asked if he suffered any problems with his eyes in the days after the mission, Van Buskirk says he did not.

The absence of miosis and the immediacy of the vomiting are two of the reasons why, when Oliver contacted a leading expert in chemical agents, she was told that the gas couldn't possibly have been sarin. "Three or four months ago I got a call from a lady from CNN," says the scientist, who asked not to be named. "She described the signs and symptoms. I told her that they did not fit with exposure to nerve agent." The scientist says that Oliver became angry with him. "She told me she knew it was sarin gas because it had been confirmed to her by the Pentagon." The scientist didn't budge from his conclusion: Sarin could not have caused the symptoms the reporter had described. Oliver never called the scientist back, and not surprisingly his comments did not appear on the show.

The Pentagon has denied the story from the outset and is conducting an investigation. Now that many of those quoted in CNN's "Valley of Death" say they were misquoted or misrepresented, and now that Adm. Moorer, Capt. McCarley, and the pilot Bishop insist no nerve gas was used, Arnett and Oliver have fallen back on the claim that they are relying on confidential sources and secret documents, which they have yet to release. Had there actually been any such documents, they surely would have been the centerpiece of the broadcast. But none was shown or quoted from. News organizations don't usually pass up the chance to reveal secret documents.

Time's managing editor Walter Isaacson, in a prepared statement, says, "We're continuing to report this

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story and will clarify the charges and countercharges when we have more information." Contacted by THE WEEKLY STANDARD, CNN refused to make Arnett or Oliver, or anchor Jeff Greenfield, who introduced the "Valley of Death" segment on *NewsStand*, available for comment. Until CNN and *Time* retract their story and apologize, a noxious cloud of dishonor hangs over them both. ♦

WISHFUL THINKING ON CHINA

By Arthur Waldron

Critics of President Clinton's upcoming China trip point to its bad symbolism—the welcome at Tiananmen Square above all. Its defenders counter with substance: Important strategic and political gains are at stake, and China is too important to let human-rights symbolism drive the agenda. Or, as Clinton put it in a recent address, "The choice is between making a symbolic point and making a real difference."

Would that it were so simple. The fact is, however, that the fundamental errors of the trip are—if this is conceivable—even worse than its symbolism. The whole enterprise reveals a profoundly unrealistic and Sinocentric approach to Asian policy that not only is unlikely to succeed, but also will work to undermine the very goals of peace and cooperation that Clinton touts to justify his visit.

TO HEAR CLINTON, ONE MIGHT IMAGINE THAT BEIJING AND WASHINGTON WERE ABOUT TO JOIN HANDS AND MARCH INTO THE FUTURE.

The American relationship with China, so President Clinton believes, "will in large measure help to determine whether the new century is one of security, peace, and prosperity for the American people." That is an appealing claim, and initially not implausible, particularly given the facts of which he carefully reminds us: that China is "already the world's most populous nation," that its people have 13 million mobile phones, and so forth. But such facts—of which the president's critics are of course well aware—do not necessarily translate into Clinton's policy of largely uncritical "engagement" of China.

Suppose someone had made a similar argument 20 years ago about the Soviet Union—and many did. The proper response, I suspect, would have been something like this: Yes, the U.S.S.R. is extremely important, and we should try very hard to lower tensions and increase cooperation. But our leverage is rather limited, and furthermore, real change is unlikely until the state democratizes. We cannot rest our security on the hope of good relations with Moscow. Therefore, the truly crucial relationships for peace in the years ahead will not be with Moscow but rather with our allies—because if ties with our allies are sound, we can probably keep the peace even if the U.S.S.R. remains a threat. China today requires a similar approach, but Clinton is not taking it. His policy commits two fundamental errors.

First, he overestimates the positive potential of the U.S.-China relationship. To hear him, one might imagine that Beijing and Washington were about to join hands and march into the future, solving the problems of nuclear proliferation, environmental pollution, and drug trafficking along the way. Such raising of expectations is irresponsible and opens the way for later disillusionment and anger. Even if it shared Washington's agenda, which it does not, the Beijing government would be too weak to carry out most of it and furthermore would be preoccupied with domestic problems.

Because cooperation on substance is so difficult, the administration may be tempted to settle for appearances instead. Not only that, it may actually sac-

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rifice substance in order to maintain the appearance (as it has done repeatedly with waivers of sanctions for nuclear and missile proliferation). Or it may seek to purchase the appearance of harmony by making concessions (as it has over Taiwan in response to threats from Beijing). Making good relations with Beijing the primary goal of U.S. Asian policy can make Washington, unwittingly, a hostage of Chinese behavior.

Second, putting China first means putting our allies second, and they notice it. If and when things go wrong in China, we will need strong Asian alliances to prevent instability from spreading. But international structures in Asia are to begin with far weaker than in Europe. Even the crucial Japanese-American security relationship cannot compare to NATO in substance. By tilting to China and bypassing the long-term allies with whom we share both interests and values, the Clinton approach is steadily corroding the very Asian alliances on which our security rests.

Even more, the tilt is already creating new risks. China's diplomatic inflexibility and active military development were among the factors that led India to develop nuclear weapons. Domestic calculations played a part, to be sure, but the decision enjoyed wide support because almost all Indians recognize that China may pose a danger that India will have to face alone. If Washington's tilt toward China continues, we may see Japan or South Korea start thinking along similar lines.

Even before the visit, then, Clinton's policy is not working. But what is the alternative? Not, to be sure, either of the straw men the president set up in his recent talk: neither "to try to isolate and contain China" nor to count on "increased commercial dealings alone" for improvement. What is required is a realistic sense of China's potentialities, a definition of where we want China to go, and a balanced set of measures, both carrots and sticks, to move things along.

Our long-term policy goal with China must be, as it was with the U.S.S.R., to foster political change in a liberal direction, for without freedom in China, genuine peace will be no more likely in Asia than it was in Europe when the Soviet Union existed. But such domestic change may come slowly, or through turmoil, or not at all, so we must hedge against risks by strengthening and developing our cooperation with other free-market and democratic states in Asia.

One who understands this is Bao Tong, former chief of staff to the liberalizing premier Zhao Ziyang who was ousted in 1989, after appearing in Tiananmen Square to plead with the student demonstrators to leave. Bao is the most senior Communist party official to be jailed for political reasons in the last 20 years. Released from prison in 1996, he lives in Beijing, where recently he spoke with the *Washington Post*. China, Bao said, "has already gone mad twice over the last 40 years. . . . You have to ask yourself a question: What will it do on the international scene? Is it a source of stability or a potential source of instability? When it doesn't have enough power, its attitude will be restrained. But once it develops and becomes strong, what kind of role is it going to play *without a complete structural change*?" [Italics added.]

The White House pays a certain lip service to this fundamental insight but neglects it in practice, systematically misreading the Chinese scene. To hear the administration tell it, you might think that China's current leadership were gradually and deliberately taking the country toward political pluralism. There is evidence: continuing economic reforms, village elections, the selective exile (as opposed to imprisonment) of leading dissidents, a general warming of the political climate—all of course welcome.

But what Bao Tong and many others appreciate—but the administration does not—is that such moves are merely tactical, in a game by the Chinese leadership whose long-term goal is to resist democratization and hold on to Communist party rule.

President Jiang Zemin, although rather cultured and humane by the previous standards of Chinese leadership, is no liberalizer. He was installed as party secretary in 1989, after the Tiananmen massacre, precisely because he opposed a political opening, and he has systematically excluded liberalizers from leadership positions, even though there are many in the Communist party. He is rumored to be preparing a speech promising democracy sometime around 2020, but there are no signs of the reforms urgently needed now—and such signs would be obvious: task forces, consulting groups, and so forth.

Jiang's post-dated promises may pacify some critics in Washington, but his procrastination bodes ill for Asia: It suggests that China will *not* reform in time; that domestic problems will go unacknowledged and unresolved and that tensions will rise; that some event—a strike, a run on the banks—may trigger a political crisis, and unrest and disorder in China may ripple out over Asia.

The current Chinese leadership is probably unequal to dealing with these dangers. Jiang Zemin is most concerned with consolidating his own power: He plays factional politics, promotes a minor cult of personality (his biography, *Chronicle of General Secretary Jiang Zemin's Important Deeds in Party Building*, is

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reportedly about to be published), and proclaims loyalty to Marxism and "Deng Xiaoping thought." He likes to travel abroad and uses foreign recognition as a substitute for genuine legitimacy at home. He is locked in uneasy rivalry with premier Zhu Rongji and former prime minister Li Peng.

But this ruling group seems to share a common calculation—which may explode in their faces. It is that economic growth, selective repression, and continued foreign support can make it possible for their Communist party to be the exception worldwide and keep its power.

What Beijing, therefore, wants above all from Clinton during his visit is that he act symbolically in ways that will enhance the prestige of this unelected Chinese leadership. Clinton may play the statesman who esteems substance over symbolism and leaves "the terms of the arrival ceremony" to his Chinese hosts. But when Jiang visited the United States last year his advance teams were at least as interested in the ceremonies (how-many-gun salute? how wide a red carpet?) as in the substance—and we accommodated them. In any case, no one imagines for a moment that the White House has not been absorbed in setting up photo opportunities and themes of the day for this high-visibility trip (e.g., Guilin, a great beauty spot. Theme of the day: "the environment").

President Clinton wanted this China trip for his own political reasons, which have nothing to do with the substance of the relationship, and the Chinese, knowing this, are making him pay for it. For the visit the Chinese reportedly made two demands: first, that the American president visit Tiananmen Square; second, that he not stop in any other Asian country during the trip. They have evidently also pressured him not to meet one on one with Martin Lee, the triumphantly reelected leader of the Hong Kong democrats. Such gestures are demanded to signal to the Chinese people that the United States supports the Chinese leadership and approves even of its most controversial policies (such as the condemnation of the 1989 democracy movement).

Indeed, for the Chinese leadership, this symbolic approval of their rule *is* the substance of the visit.

Clinton has unwisely agreed. And every day brings fresh evidence of why he should not have done so. The direction of social change globally is manifestly away from outmoded authoritarian regimes like Suharto's and China's and towards democratically legitimated constitutional systems. Clinton of all people should understand this: He memorably lectured Jiang Zemin about being "on the wrong side of history" during last year's visit. The demand for constitutionalism and democracy has been perennial in China since the turn of the century, and it is picking up once again. The Hong Kong elections flashed unmistakably the message that Chinese people are not just economic animals; they want freedom and political participation too.

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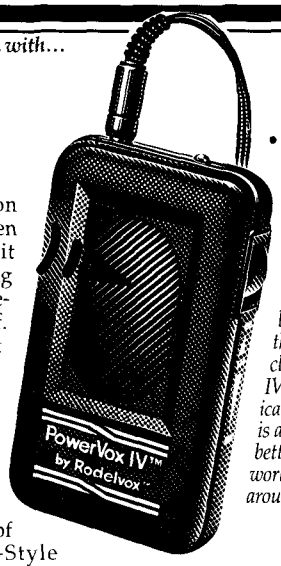

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Yet the White House seems oblivious. Even as President Clinton verbally acknowledges the need for democratic change in China, his actions signal that he is betting on Jiang Zemin to stay in power and determine the Chinese future. This is as naive as expecting (and many did) that Gorbachev was going to reform, legitimate, and renew the Soviet Union. The fact is that the party's bold decisions to unleash economic and social reform in China over the past two decades have created a tide that is now washing away the foundations of Communist authority. Powerful transforming forces have rendered party rule obsolete and are pushing China toward profound political change. The current leadership, with which the United States seeks deep engagement, has decided to resist that change. But that will not head off change—only render it more likely to be chaotic or otherwise dangerous.

This building political drama and the American and world response to it should be at the heart of policy, but you will find scarcely a hint of it in the calculations of the Clinton administration. A happy outcome—a smooth transition to the "stable, open, prosperous China" that the administration seeks—is unlikely. So what the White House should be doing, along with everything it can to aid a smooth transition, is preparing realistically for a failure of reform. This failure may lead to domestic unrest, or to chaotic liberalization, or to efforts at a new authoritarianism, perhaps coupled with a hardline foreign policy. "Engagement" with China will be no help then. The best bulwark will be our alliances, and today our Asian allies are deeply, if quietly, concerned about the possibility of a well-armed, assertive, and anti-democratic China in the future.

So Clinton's echoing silence, on the eve of his trip, about China's military programs and the security concerns of our allies is both astonishing and deeply worrying. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, China has faced no immediate or discernible threat. Yet it is pushing full-steam ahead with an ambitious and extensive military buildup. This includes the full panoply of nuclear arms—all sorts of warheads, MIRVs, surface and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and so forth. In addition there are advanced ex-Soviet anti-ship missiles clearly designed to threaten U.S. carrier battle groups, should these battle groups come to the aid of an Asian ally in the future; advanced fighter aircraft, stealthy diesel submarines, plans for a Chinese aircraft carrier, as well as space and information-warfare capabilities.

What is this all for? In part it is clearly a payoff to the People's Liberation Army, which was not happy about murdering the students in June 1989 and wants the proverbial "new toys." But the buildup also has something to do with Chinese territorial claims—the lines on official Chinese maps that do not correspond to reality, but show as sovereign territory of the People's Republic of China everything from Taiwan and the Japanese-held Senkaku Islands to the South China Sea and disputed territories along the Korean and Indian borders. There are the makings here of many a bloody battle, and the weapons China is currently developing—"force-projection" capabilities such as aircraft and blue-water naval forces—suggest Beijing has not ruled out the use of force.

Our allies have reason to be worried, but we profess not to be. How seriously can allies take a U.S. president who doesn't even mention their most important concern? After all, when we dealt with the Soviet Union, even the most resolute doves insisted on talking with Moscow about, among other things, Soviet arms. But what kind of weapons is Clinton going to talk about limiting with a rapidly rearming China?

The almost comical answer is: Indian and Pakistani. Those countries, says Clinton, must "recognize that developing weapons of mass destruction is the wrong way to define their greatness." One may ask: Does that go for China too, which has an incomparably more advanced and active nuclear program? Or is Chinese greatness different? Or for that matter, how about the United States? Our Asian allies are understandably puzzled.

Nor will reference to the way we define our policy help them. The official phrase for our goal with China is "constructive strategic partnership." We have carefully indicated that "strategic" here has nothing to do with things military: We are interested, it seems, in the environment, rescues at sea, and so forth. But someone should have checked a few dictionaries before settling on this exact wording. For in both Chinese and Japanese the first component of the compound meaning "strategic" is the character for "war" [*zhan* in Chinese, *sen* in Japanese]. In those two languages then, it is hard to avoid reading the American policy as being, in effect, a military alliance.

So far, our Asian allies are not openly criticizing the ever more apparent tilt toward China by the Clinton White House, but in private they express alarm. We, in turn, should be alarmed by the possibilities for ourselves and for the region if their fear and distrust lead them to move away from the United States and instead to seek to guarantee their own security.

Japan is the keystone of the current Asian security structure. Both the Japanese government and the

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Japanese people are deeply worried about renewed nuclear proliferation, and as a result they may be moving away from their long-held pacifism. They are moreover stung by the degree to which Clinton bypasses them and their interests, but—owing to their cumbersome domestic politics and low international profile—they are unwilling to make a scene. Thoughtful Japanese have valued stabilizing alliances since the days of their alignment with Britain early in this century, and today, in spite of its difficulties, they value their connection with the United States very highly. But it is now becoming thinkable that the alliance could end, undermined and displaced by the American connection to Beijing.

Much the same story can be told for nearly every Asian state. Worried by China and increasingly uncertain about U.S. policy, they are considering ways to guarantee their security unilaterally—witness, for example, the proliferation of advanced fighter and submarine programs in Asia. But unilateral security is generally a mirage: A world of individual strong states without alliances or shared interests will be a dangerous and anarchic place. The U.S. tilt, which strengthens China alone, only adds to this dangerous regional trend.

The Indian nuclear tests prove just how destabilizing is the Chinese military buildup. India faces China on three borders: to the north directly and to the east and west through China's increasingly well-armed allies Pakistan and Burma. China has contributed decisively to Pakistan's missile and nuclear programs, with little U.S. response. Washington should at least have grasped that India might go nuclear and that therefore U.S. vigilance was in order. But it didn't.

So what is worrisome here is not only the Indian proliferation itself, but also the fact that the administration discounted the possibility of proliferation—despite the clear logic of events, despite public statements by Indian leaders, despite intelligence information about earlier Indian preparations for tests. This is what is called wishful thinking. As with China, the Clinton White House is not making realistic assessments. Instead it is painting eloquent and politically expedient word-pictures, full of "peace" and "stability" and "dialogue" and so forth, which may be wonderful to contemplate, but which provide no map, or a dangerously misleading map, of the years ahead.

To fix things, only a new policy will do—a policy squarely addressing the military buildup that worries China's neighbors and is driving Asian arms races. Like many foreigners ignorant of Asia, President Clinton and his colleagues may be bedazzled by China's size, power, and superficial unity, to say nothing of the prospect of money to be made there. Like others before them, they ignore the risks and pitfalls. But although good relations and proper diplomacy with Beijing are most desirable, China is far too unpredictable to serve as a cornerstone of U.S. Asian policy. The uncertainty surrounding China's future argues for keeping some distance—and resting our interests and Asia's on democratic values and tested friendships. ♦

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Nixon and His Monica

Last Thoughts of an Old Man in a Dry Season

By Noemie Emery

Once upon a time, there was a scandal-plagued president with an intern named Monica—but it was a blonde Monica, Monica Crowley, the girl whose interest in international politics led her in 1990 to Richard Nixon, then the King Lear of Saddle River, New Jersey.

But Crowley, in fact, resembles Bill Clinton's Monica less than she resembles Doris Kearns (now Doris Kearns Goodwin), another sweet young thing who gained access to another wounded old lion and used it to launch her career by writing *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* in 1976.

Like Kearns, Crowley shows—first in her 1996 account of conversations with the former president, *Nixon Off the Record*, and now in her latest collection, *Nixon in Winter: His Final Revelations about Diplomacy, Watergate, and Life out of the Arena*—that she is able to talk about policy. And like Kearns, she knows our real interest is the presidential tangle of the personal and the political, the destructive imperative of ambition and self-immolation. Why do smart people do dumb things that hurt them? And why can't we look away?

Nixon—like Ted Kennedy, Gary Hart, and Bill Clinton—belongs to the gang of American politicians who, despite good brains and political instincts, were lamed by disgrace at the height of their prospects. Hart and Kennedy were high-powered senators well on their way to being crowned by their party when they were derailed by mishaps with women and water. Nixon and Clinton were presidents whose power had just been cemented by electoral-college landslides when they found themselves mangled by scandal.

Kevin Chadwick

Monica Crowley
Nixon in Winter
His Final Revelations about Diplomacy, Watergate, and Life out of the Arena
Random House, 480 pp., $30

Hart's career as a politician and public figure ended. Kennedy hung on as a senator and leader of narrow-gauge causes, but saw his national prospects diminish. Nixon was driven from the presidency, though he later remade himself as an itinerant statesman. Clinton may serve out his term in office, but his prestige and some of his power are gone. When Hart bowed out in 1987, Nixon wrote: "Dear Gary: This is just a line to tell you that I thought you handled a very difficult situation uncommonly well." Hart has similarly sympathized with Bill Clinton's troubles. When Nixon died in 1994, Clinton's warm speech at his funeral—a plea to judge the "whole man" apart from his scandals—struck many as being a plea for himself.

But who should feel for them, if not one another? Their mutual interest seems to border on obsession—and it suggests that while generations of politicians claim to model themselves on John F. Kennedy, it may be Nixon who has the genuine political followers. Given the utter lack of self-knowledge in Kennedy, Hart, and Clinton, Nixon's ruminations as divulged to his aide may be the closest we come to an insight into them all. *Nixon in Winter* is a roadmap for all who came after, a template for a state of mind.

"Those who were after me during Watergate were after me for a long time," Nixon said to his Monica. "They weren't interested in Watergate as much as they were interested

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in getting me on [Alger] Hiss and Vietnam. I gave them what they needed. But believe me, Watergate was just the excuse." Or as Hillary Clinton put it on *Good Morning America*, a "vast right-wing conspiracy" has had her husband in its crosshairs since his first term as governor of Arkansas.

"I had been a target since Alger Hiss," Nixon explained to Crowley, "because during that case I did the worst thing you can do to the press, prove them wrong. . . . I knew that they were out there, ready to pounce." As Gary Hart said, "A newly aggressive and intrusive press establishment, never comfortable with my refusal to be categorized, exploited and possibly created an incident." In the *New Yorker*, David Remnick adds, "A prominent Washington journalist once told me that Hart, after a couple of drinks in an airplane, . . . described his own fall in 1987 as a conspiracy of power elites: the military establishment, the energy industry . . . all the industries he planned to reform."

For all such people, the scandal that destroyed them is merely the pretext for their undoing. If it did not exist, other things would be invented or seized upon. The world may see them as crooks, but in their own eyes they are victims, innocent targets of forces so entrenched and pervasive that even the presidency is helpless before them.

And they never do anything wrong. "Wrong" is what is done to them by their enemies. How could people mistake the avuncular charities of Vernon Jordan and Nate Landow for witness tampering? How could they think Nixon meant what he said on those tapes? The closest Crowley comes to wringing a confession from Nixon is his admission that he had been "wrong" (but mainly "stupid") in giving his opponents an opening: "The press didn't trust me after Hiss, and they were just out there, circling and waiting. . . . I should have been more careful about not doing anything wrong."

Linked as such figures are by their odd views of justice, it is inevitable they should feel common bonds. Hart, Remnick says, was "fascinated by Nixon—by his cynicism, and his uncanny ability to remain in the political limelight." Nixon could feel sorry for Hart, and Hart could sympathize with Clinton, and Clinton could find it in himself to speak warmly of Nixon.

But Nixon couldn't return the favor to Clinton, at least. He egged on Clinton's pursuers—in part from Republican partisanship, in part to dilute his unique place in history, and in part for the company misery loves. Intrigued by the sight of a man who—despite his very different temperament—seemed to share all his weak points, he was perplexed by the emerging symmetries of the efforts at cover-up, enraged that those who had once pursued him so fiercely should now do the same things themselves. "And there was Hillary, on the impeachment committee, screaming about the eighteen and a half minutes, and she's in Little Rock, shredding," he told Crowley with justifiable rancor—adding: "She's up to her ass in it, and they are both guilty as hell." Convinced, correctly, that he could have survived had he at once exposed and denounced the original burglary, Nixon demanded of Crowley, "Didn't anyone learn from Watergate?"

LIKE ALL HIS BROTHERS IN SCANDAL, NIXON COULD NEVER FACE THE FAULT IN HIMSELF.

Apparently not. But though there is only one way they all look at scandal, there are different ways they handle its aftermath. Gary Hart still appears poleaxed, frozen in time at the moment of impact. "I will never escape from this event, because the press cannot afford to let me escape it," he wrote his editor, adding that only "suicide" or "an act of utmost contrition, which I am incapable of making" could reinstate him in the public eye.

Nixon and Kennedy tried a different technique: Knowing that Watergate and Chappaquiddick would always be with them, they set out to construct a different reality—a reality of hard work upon serious matters—that might give a new balance to their lives. So, "step by step, book by book, speech by speech, he began the comeback," Crowley writes. Nixon could not erase Watergate, but he could place it in context as not the only moment in his life.

There were also some matters of pride: "Confounding his enemies became less a matter of revenge, and more a matter of his own unwillingness to accept the sentence they had imposed on him." This worked to a point, as it did for Ted Kennedy, but with strict limits imposed. As the *New York Times* warned the Clintons at the emergence of the latest round of charges, an unresolved scandal works as a permanent fountain of negative energy, a low-grade infection and chronic disease. Figures struck by disgrace may eventually win back the right to be taken seriously by serious people. But it is always inside a limited radius, bounded by doubt and by ridicule. There are always offices they cannot seek, places they cannot go, things they cannot say, issues they cannot address.

Even after their comeback, there remains a duality in their public persona: However respected they become inside a particular discipline, they continue to be figures of fun in the general culture, good for a laugh on the radio or a skit on late-night TV. And this reflects the destructive duality in their private persona: the unresolved tension between the workhorse and the playboy Kennedy,

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the Quaker and the gangster Nixon, the thinker and the playboy Hart, the empathizer-in-chief and the selfish thug Clinton.

Of them all, the dualities in Nixon were the most dramatic. At his height, he felt himself more hunted than ever, making needless strikes against enemies who were already beaten and provoking the storm that drove him from office. And then, having done his worst, he did the unexpected: He improved, disentangling the statesman who had always been there from the bonds of his ego. The strain and the tension drained out of his features. The Nixon she knew, Crowley declares, was a better man than the one who caused and suffered from Watergate.

It makes the whole thing that much sadder: "When Nixon looked back to that time," Crowley writes, "he was struck by the incomprehensible sadness of his own downfall and suffering." And it makes the whole thing that much more puzzling: "He issued quiet and emotional explanations, fiery defiance, defensive justifications, bitter criticisms, earnest apologies, and determined lack of remorse."

The one thing he could not be was completely honest. Like all his brothers in scandal, he could not face the fault in himself. Kennedy placed the Chappaquiddick crash in the train of disasters that befell his family—accident, war, assassination—as something that happened to him, not something he caused. Hart thought the press made him sail off to Bimini. Clinton thinks Whitewater, Monica, and the China affairs were made up by talk radio. Nixon thought that Watergate was about Alger Hiss. The ultimate cause of their scandals is the hatred of others, circling, waiting to seize them.

What is missing, of course, is a rational explanation of how so much hatred gets focused upon them. Could it be because they gave fair-minded people reason to suspect them of questionable, criminal, or stupid behavior? Could it be that they had made enemies by their conduct? That they made disheartened supporters think they defiled the office they held?

Not in their minds. The cause always lies in the plottings of others—of the press, the special interests, the vast right-wing conspiracy, Alger Hiss. As Crowley puts it, "Nixon advanced a theory about his downfall that subtracted him from the equation. . . . His theories about Watergate . . . were more about creating a psychological shelter than about advancing a new truth." It was a blind spot he shared. "What you said about the media needed to be said," Nixon wrote to Hart, fingering their common scapegoat in what Remnick calls their "strange kinship" of unreality and self-delusion.

But what finally makes people like Kennedy, Nixon, Hart, and Clinton do things that bring them such ridicule? Some people say that their fear is so strong it inadvertently brings on the thing they fear. Some say they fear disaster so much that they tempt it on purpose, as the man who fears heights edges close to the precipice. Some say they think themselves unworthy, feeling compelled to display their own vices when they are given too much.

In a 1984 article on the self-destructive arc of Carl Bernstein, Rudy Maxa quotes Dustin Hoffman, who played Bernstein in the movie version of *All the President's Men*: "I understand why Carl did so well on Watergate. Carl is essentially a f—up and he has to fail, and Nixon is a f—up and he has to fail, so Carl could always understand Nixon."

Maybe he could. But we can't. ♦

A Peace of Holbrooke

From Yugoslavia to Dayton, Ohio

By Tod Lindberg

The turning point for Bosnia came in August 1995 with a NATO bombing campaign. The air strikes succeeded in doing what no diplomatic effort had: persuading Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic to join in ending the four-year-old war over the pieces of the former Yugoslavia. Before the bombing, the aggressors in Bosnia treated international efforts with contempt, even taking hostages from the ineffectual U.N. peacekeeping force. But barely three months after the strikes began, a comprehensive peace agreement was reached at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio.

Richard Holbrooke
To End a War
Random House, 432 pp., $27.95

The decision to bomb for peace was controversial, to put it mildly. Most European governments found it unattractive and risky, as did NATO, the American military, and the major international organizations. Yet they were all equally mindful of the failure of diplomacy in Bosnia—and its horrible consequences in lost lives, ethnic cleansing and refugees. What to do?

The answer turns out to have been to take a vacation.

It was August, after all. The president of the United States, the vice president, the national security advis-

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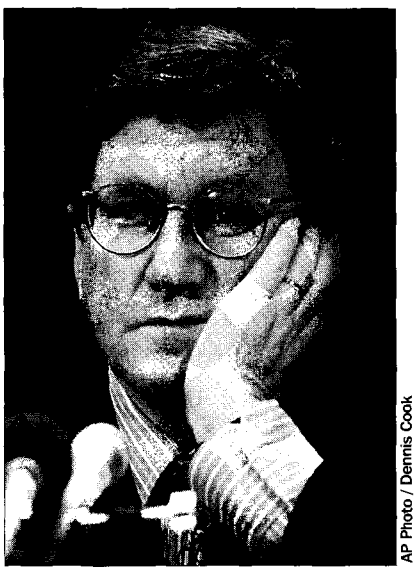
er, the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, the director of central intelligence, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were on holiday, every last one of them. And so it was that the deputies in charge of Bosnian policy were able to do what the principals didn't have the stomach to do—but didn't have the will to stop from their August vacation spots, either. Richard Holbrooke, the assistant secretary of state who had taken charge of the peacemaking efforts and was the leading proponent of air strikes in the administration, describes the extraordinary scene in his new book, *To End a War*:

> As the hours and the days blurred into one continuous crisis session, the deputies were in charge—so much so that they began teasing each other about it. "We joked," Strobe Talbott, who was acting Secretary of State, recalled later, "that it was 'deputy dogs' day," and how we felt like the kid in *Home Alone*.... Led by Sandy Berger, who was acting National Security Advisor, the team included John White (acting Secretary of Defense), Admiral Bill Owens (acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), George Tenet (acting director of the CIA), Undersecretary of Defense Walter Slocombe, and Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff. The only Cabinet-level official not on vacation was Madeleine Albright, who shuttled feverishly between Washington and New York trying to overcome the reluctance of U.N. officials to take action.

The U.N. was an especially difficult obstacle, for Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali staunchly opposed bombing and retained, in effect, a veto over military action. Fortunately, at a critical moment, Boutros-Ghali "was unreachable on a commercial aircraft," so Albright "dealt instead with his best deputy, Kofi Annan, who was in charge of peacekeeping operations. At 11:45 A.M., New York time, came a big break: Annan informed Talbott and Albright that he had instructed the U.N.'s civilian officials and military commanders to relinquish for a limited time their authority to veto air strikes in Bosnia."

It only remained, as it were, to cut obstructionist NATO higher-ups out of the loop. That task fell to NATO Secretary-General Willy Claes. "Instead of calling for another formal meeting to make a decision, Claes simply *informed* the other members of NATO" that he had authorized his military commanders to take action. *Voilà*: The inertia ends, the policy changes, negotiations begin, and—hardly automatically, but as a product of much the same determination and ingenuity that led to the air strikes—



AP Photo / Dennis Cook

Richard Holbrooke

the war is over, well in time for the principals to return from their vacations to organize conferences and signing ceremonies at which to congratulate themselves for their diplomatic achievement.

Holbrooke's first legacy to American foreign policy is, of course, the Dayton peace accords, the agreement that ended the fighting between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia—a peace that Holbrooke seemed personally to will into being against all odds. But a second legacy is *To End a War*, his gripping memoir of the Dayton negotiations, their prelude and aftermath. This book is a masterpiece not only for its unforgettable account of the diplomacy of Dayton—an experience the author convincingly describes as "something like a combination of chess and mountain climbing"—but also for the clarity of Holbrooke's vision of post-Cold War Europe and the United States. We will see what remains of that clarity when, as Clinton announced last week, he becomes U.S. ambassador to the U.N.

Partly at the urging of Holbrooke himself, who was serving as an informal adviser, candidate Bill Clinton in 1992 was harshly critical of the Bush administration's handling of the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. When President Clinton took office, however, he initially offered nothing different, even as the war escalated and televised scenes of massacre on the periphery of civilized Europe became common.

Holbrooke discerns two main reasons for American indifference. The first was the thought that a European conflict ought to be up to the Europeans to solve, with the encouragement of the United States perhaps, but not with the United States in the lead role. As President Bush's secretary of state, James Baker, put it: "It was time to make the Europeans step up to the plate and show that they could act as a unified power."

The second was the view that ethnic hatred in the Balkans was so deeply rooted it could never be overcome, and that it would be foolish of outsiders to try. Holbrooke notes the esteem with which President Clinton and key administration officials held Robert Kaplan's acclaimed 1993 best-seller, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, a book filled with tales of ancient animosity.

Early in 1995, Holbrooke published an article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in which he called the former Yugoslavia "the greatest collective security failure of the West since the 1930s." What Holbrooke understood was that without American leadership, there was no hope for peace in Bosnia. The Europeans, as they

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themselves were beginning to understand, were incapable of organizing to meet the challenge. In this sense, Bosnia was not merely a European problem. What good was a structure of European security that periodically allowed such episodes in Europe? And what would a policy of indifference to Bosnia say about the willingness of the United States to remain engaged in Europe? The answer was clear: Without an active American role in the former Yugoslavia, American-European relations would enter a crisis from which they might never recover.

Holbrooke finally got the chance to pursue his vision in 1995. He and his team began shuttling back and forth between Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, winning an agreement in which the Bosnian Serb irregular forces—the target of the American air strikes—would lift the siege of Sarajevo. Meanwhile, Croatian and Muslim forces were enjoying some success on the battlefield, recapturing some territory and thus facilitating later discussions over the map of Bosnia. As the Croat-Muslim offensive was running out of steam, Holbrooke brokered a cease-fire that led to the twenty-one-day negotiation in Dayton. The three presidents, Bosnia's Alija Izetbegovic, Croatia's Franjo Tudjman, and Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic, finally agreed to a wide-ranging settlement on geographical, political, and military issues that kept Bosnia a single country—with a little help from a sixty-thousand man, American-led NATO implementation force.

To End a War rarely mentions the centuries of ethnic tension and violence in the Balkans, a point for which Holbrooke has been criticized. In fact, though, the book is a convincing refutation of the view that the barbarous past must triumph, and the Dayton accords are a vindication of Holbrooke's claim that nationalism wasn't something with which Balkan leaders were inflamed, but something they inflamed to further their own ambitions. In the end, the old animosities and ancient hatreds proved responsive to judicious application of pressure and diplomacy.

The Dayton accords remain controversial in a number of ways—first among which is the fact that Serbia's aggression was rewarded. Holbrooke describes the poignant moment at which Bosnia's president gave his final assent: "Time had run out, and we needed an answer immediately. There was a long, agonizing pause. We watched Izetbegovic carefully. No one spoke. Finally, speaking slowly, Izetbegovic said, 'It is not a just peace.' He paused for what seemed like a minute, but was probably only three seconds. 'But my people need peace.'"

Holbrooke himself devotes a section at the conclusion of the book to the ways in which the agreement might have been improved. And, of course, the implementation of the provisions of the agreement has been anything but smooth.

But who can say, two and a half years later, that Bosnia, Europe, and relations between Europe and the United States would be better off if Dayton had failed or had never been attempted? The fact is that improved and rejuvenated European security arrangements stand as the Clinton administration's signal foreign policy achievement. Holbrooke brought clarity to questions of American power and leadership in an administration not widely peopled with clear thinkers on the subject.

Holbrooke often notes that his small team enjoyed extraordinary latitude to conduct the negotiations and had excellent support from Washington. That seems true—as far as it goes. But *To End a War* is not a full-dress history of Bosnian policy. Holbrooke keeps his book tightly focused on himself and those closest to him, his negotiating team and his interlocutors. He is quick with praise for timely interventions by his principals: a firm word from the president, a tough comment from the secretary of state. But he does not delve into their motives or goals.

Perhaps they were every bit as committed to the process as Richard Holbrooke. Or perhaps they were mainly on vacation. ♦

MR. SHAWN, HE DEAD

The Heart of the New Yorker

By Hilton Kramer

Of the many stories about William Shawn in his last years as editor of the *New Yorker*, my favorite concerns Henry Fairlie. A highly regarded journalist in London for many years (and generally credited with having coined the term "Establishment"), Fairlie was living in Washington when he came to Shawn's attention.

Hilton Kramer is editor of the New Criterion.

Summoned to New York for an audience with the legendary Shawn, Fairlie was asked what he would like to write, and he responded by suggesting a series of profiles of major American institutions. This wasn't as much of an innovation at the *New Yorker* as he may have supposed, but Shawn was far too courteous to point this out. Instead, he asked what the first subject would be, to which Fairlie replied: "I think it would be interesting to write a profile of the United

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States Marine Corps." He scarcely had time to register the look of utter horror on Shawn's face before the editor rose to indicate that the interview was over. Shawn walked down the hall in silence, and it wasn't until the elevator arrived that he sent the writer on his way with the words: "Mr. Fairlie, here at the *New Yorker* we are opposed to war."

I was reminded of this example of the higher fatuousness that often prevailed during the last decades of Shawn's editorship of the *New Yorker*—particularly where politics was concerned—when in a recent editorial written by Jonathan Schell for the *Nation* I came upon the sentence: "Which is more important: Clinton's relations with Monica or human survival?"

Schell was the writer Shawn was grooming to succeed him as editor of the *New Yorker*. He seems also to have been Shawn's principal political counselor from the moment he contributed his first piece to the *New Yorker* in 1967, two years after graduating from Harvard. (Need I add that it was a report on the war in Vietnam?) Lillian Ross describes their relationship in her new memoir, *Here But Not Here: My Life with William Shawn and the New Yorker*:

> It was with Jonathan Schell that Bill collaborated over a period of about twenty years in writing, week after week, about important political matters at the time—the Vietnam War, the Nixon years and Watergate, and the menace—the imminent menace, they felt—of nuclear war. They would do considerable talking about the content, then Schell would write a draft, and together they would revise and finish it. They took the work with the utmost seriousness.

In the second new book to appear on the topic, *Remembering Mr. Shawn's New Yorker*, Ved Mehta confirms Ross's account:

> Jonathan's having gone on to become the primary Comment writer meant that he had spent more time than anyone else with Mr. Shawn, for Mr. Shawn lavished a great deal of attention on each Comment piece. Since Comment was the closest thing to an editorial in the magazine, it had to correspond to his judgment and opinion. . . . For some years, therefore, Mr. Shawn had been seen going into Jonathan's office most afternoons and spending an hour or more there. No one else, it seemed, had that kind of access to him since he became the editor.

Exactly what qualified Schell to succeed Shawn as editor of the *New Yorker*—besides the fact that he, too, was opposed to war—remained a mystery to everyone at the magazine

Lillian Ross
Here But Not Here
My Life with William Shawn and the New Yorker
Random House, 288 pp., $25

Ved Mehta
Remembering Mr. Shawn's New Yorker
The Invisible Art of Editing
Overlook, 368 pp., $29.95

but Shawn. Nor were Schell's qualifications as an expert on nuclear warfare any less murky. Reviewing both these new books on the *New Yorker* for the *Los Angeles Times*, Jeremy Bernstein—the *New Yorker*'s principal writer on science from 1962 to 1993 and himself a physicist—cast an interesting light on the question of Schell's intellectual competence in this regard:

> I barely knew Schell, and he seemed like a charming, friendly man to me. I had an experience with him, however, that really worried me. A year or so earlier [in 1976], he had asked me to see him in his office. I had just published a long profile of Albert Einstein in the magazine, and Schell told me that he wanted to understand relativity better. Could I explain it to him? I got through about three minutes, when he said cheerfully that he guessed physics was something that couldn't really be explained to the layman. Since this is what I thought I had been doing at the magazine for the previous 25 years, I was rather taken aback. And now he was going to be my editor.

Despite Shawn's machinations on his behalf, Schell never did succeed to the editorship. Those machinations caused a good deal of strife at the *New Yorker*, yet Shawn persisted in his efforts to make Schell his successor in the face of considerable opposition.

It certainly had nothing to do with any demonstrated editorial skill on Schell's part. On one of the rare occasions when he was entrusted to deal with another writer's manuscript, the result—according to Ved Mehta, anyway—was so disastrous that Shawn himself was obliged to intervene to repair the damage. And yet, an incapacity to perform such an essential editorial task hardly mattered. What counted for Shawn above all else was Schell's political zeal. That was what drove Shawn to such lengths in his campaign to secure the editorship for Schell.

Shawn was clearly convinced that no one but Schell could be depended upon to uphold what he saw as the *New Yorker*'s political mission. Under his own editorship, that mission amounted to little more than a facile, holier-than-thou codification of the left-liberal and pacifist political agenda of George McGovern in the 1972 presidential election. It tells us everything we need to know about Shawn's politics—and therefore the *New Yorker*'s under his command—to discover in Mehta's memoir that Schell, obviously with Shawn's blessing, took leave from the magazine to write campaign speeches for McGovern.

Thus the politics that crippled the Democratic party for a generation also had the effect of sealing the fate of the *New Yorker*. Once Shawn had irreversibly failed in his attempt to make Schell his successor, he effectively left it to others to determine the future of the magazine—the future that gave us the magazine's current editor, Tina Brown.

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The odd thing about Ved Mehta's *Remembering Mr. Shawn's New Yorker* is that the pieties it lavishes on every aspect of Shawn's life and work are so frequently at odds with his own account of the demoralization and disarray that overtook the *New Yorker* in the last days of his hero's editorial tenure. Owing to Shawn's ill-judged exertions on Schell's behalf, the top senior editors of the magazine—Gardner Botsford, Robert Bingham, and Roger Angell—nearly succeeded in staging what Mehta describes as a "coup" to take control of the succession process. Earlier in the 1970s, an attempt to unionize the magazine's staff plunged the *New Yorker* into what even Mehta does not hesitate to call "turmoil." According to Mehta, "we were having a belated version of the sixties rebellion"—a rebellion that Shawn's *New Yorker* loudly recommended for the rest of the country but which he wanted no part of when it posed a threat to his own authority at the magazine.

Mehta sets out to give us a portrait of the editor as a saint and a sage, yet the net effect of his book is to leave us with the impression of a man so isolated from the world around him that he was no longer capable of dealing with the realities of either his own situation or that of the magazine. In the end, writes Mehta, Shawn's only confidants were Schell and Lillian Ross, his mistress. "Mr. Shawn, deskbound as he was, and hemmed in by his phobias," Mehta continues, "had long relied on Lillian as his special eyes and ears, to keep him abreast of things going on in the city and in the culture at large." With such confidants, alas, Shawn was scarcely in need of enemies—of which, it turns out, he had a great many at the *New Yorker*.

It should come as no surprise to find that the life of William Shawn—a life so largely spent at the *New Yorker*—would itself in the end come to resemble a *New Yorker* short story by John Cheever or even Donald Barthelme. But the problem with her *Here But Not Here: My Life with William Shawn and the New Yorker* is that Lillian Ross is not a talent of the order of Cheever or Barthelme. Morally obtuse, intellectually shallow, and psychologically tone-deaf to the anomaly of her attachment to a lover who went home every night for forty years to his wife's bed, Ross insists at every turn on proclaiming the "normalcy" of her relation to Shawn without ever persuading us that she really believes it. Whatever may have been her merits as a journalist, moreover, Ross doesn't have the sensibility—never mind the prose—to recount the story of her forty-year affair with Shawn as anything but soap opera.

Like Ved Mehta in this respect, Ross is so intent upon aggrandizing her subject that she is totally unaware of the discredit she has brought upon the man she set out to idolize. In another respect, however, both of these books do inadvertently pay homage to Shawn's celebrated gifts as an editor, for both give us dispiriting proof of what their manuscripts must have looked like before Shawn applied his magical powers to their improvement. ♦

MRS. PEEL AND MR. STEED

Remembering the Original Avengers

By Brian Murray

Initially, Emma Peel was a man. When *The Avengers* debuted on British television in 1961, John Steed's crime-fighting partner was a male physician played by Ian Hendry. The actor Patrick Macnee was—as he remained through the nine seasons of the program—Special Agent Steed. But in most respects the early, low-budget version of *The Avengers* bore little resemblance to what the show became. Shot in kinescope, its *noir* look and grimy backstreet sets recalled the early thrillers of Graham Greene: Steed and Hendry wore bulky trench coats and smoked.

Toby Miller
The Avengers
Indiana University Press,
192 pp., $19.95

Mrs. Peel, played by Diana Rigg, was Steed's most famous female partner. But she wasn't the first. Honor Blackman replaced Hendry in the show's second season, and her character, Catherine Gale, was a proto-Peel: a vivacious, educated, leather-wearing widow who sent thugs flying with a bit of ju-jitsu. The show's early creators fancied her the likely combination of Grace Kelly, Margaret Bourke-White, and Margaret Mead.

Rigg joined the series when, in 1965, Blackman moved on to more exalted things—playing Pussy Galore in the James Bond film, *Goldfinger*. With Blackman, *The Avengers* became one of Britain's most successful programs: an international hit and the most profitable export in the history of British television. *The Avengers* ended production in 1969, one year after Rigg's exit brought Steed a new partner, Tara King, played by Linda Thorson. But the program remains in wide syndication, attracting new viewers and sparking a growing number of websites, articles, and books. Long in the works, a big-budget

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movie version of *The Avengers*—featuring Ralph Fiennes as Steed and Uma Thurman as Mrs. Peel—is now set for late-summer release.

In the 1960s, the show's wide appeal owed much to Rigg's chic good looks and Macnee's aristocratic panache. Its producers—Brian Clemens and Albert Fennell—very cleverly met American expectations by mixing nostalgic images of Merry Old England with products and symbols meant to underscore Britain's post-Beatles place as the center of European fashion and style. Thus Steed sports a bowler, totes a brolly, and drives a Bentley. Mrs. Peel favors catsuits and modish boots and speeds around in a powder-blue Lotus Elan. Steed, Macnee has noted, "was eighteenth century. But the woman was essentially twenty-first century."

Over the years many fine screen actors took roles on *The Avengers*, Peter Cushing, Donald Sutherland, and John Cleese among them. Episode directors included Charles Crichton, whose *Dead of Night* and *Lavender Hill Mob* rank among the most noteworthy British films of the 1940s and '50s. But the persistent appeal of *The Avengers* derives even more from the high quality of its writing. At its best during the Rigg-Macnee years, the series was consistently witty, suspenseful, and fun. It was smart too, demanding from its viewers what Kingsley Amis, a devoted admirer, termed "mental agility." If Ian Fleming, Lewis Carroll, and Roald Dahl had teamed up on a television series, the result would have looked very much like *The Avengers*.

In fact, from its start, *The Avengers* enlisted some highly imaginative scriptwriters, including Tony Williamson, Philip Levene, and Dennis Spooner, who later contributed to another legendary British series, *Dr. Who*. But Brian Clemens—acting as producer, writer, and story editor—probably did most to define and refine the show's urbane style and uncluttered look. It was Clemens who insisted that "no woman should be killed" and that "no extras should populate the streets."

Associated British Studios / British Film Institute

Patrick Macnee as John Steed and Honor Blackman as Catherine Gale

All the show's scripts have been summarized by Dave Rogers in *The Complete Avengers*, a hefty 1989 reference guide, recently republished. Read chronologically, the plots show the series moving steadily from urban grit to high camp. *The Avengers* had always faced up to the reality of the Cold War; but, by the mid-1960s, Soviet agents are likely to be faintly clownish figures bearing names like Ivan and Nutski. As the show grew more whimsical, its villains became colorful cranks with dotty but dangerous schemes to rule Britain or destroy the world. Thus, in one episode, Steed and Mrs. Peel contend with a band of female fitness instructors bent on cleansing the planet of men. In another, a demented cartoonist stalks and kills his victims costumed as "The Winged Avenger," his own comic strip creation, a monstrous bird of prey. At other times, the hero and heroine faced man-eating plants, deadly robots, and house cats programmed to kill.

For Macnee, *The Avengers* offered "a surrealistic Grimm's fairy-tale sort of terror." Clemens himself described the show as a "Doris Day comedy" and "a spoof with dramatic overtones." In *The Avengers*, a new book about the series, Toby Miller offers fresh facts about its evolution and amusing anecdotes about its stars. He notes, for example, that Macnee modeled Steed's character in part on a "foppish but strong" figure played by Ralph Richardson in a 1939 film, *Q Planes*; that the no-nonsense Rigg sometimes ditched annoying admirers by noting "it's illegal to sign autographs in the street"; that in 1963 Macnee and Blackman, performing as a duet, released the single "Kinky Boots," a musical satire of fashion that has been variously described as the first example of Marxist rap and—more plausibly—as one of the ten worst records ever made.

As Miller points out, *The Avengers* made frequent use of fairly sophisticated cinematic techniques: Dutch angles, hand-held cameras, and worm's-eye shooting. It also "fractured" stories, sometimes "knitting them into other ones"; it grew

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increasingly mannered and ironic, "often making style into content." The series parodied itself, and the spy genre generally, and winked knowingly at *Goldfinger*, *Batman*, *Mission: Impossible*, and other popular films and television programs of the day. *The Avengers*, in other words, was postmodern before postmodern was cool.

But as Miller also shows, the series stood as well for what are, in the end, sturdy British values and beliefs. The would-be autocrats it portrays are invariably humiliated and dispatched. Its mad scientists always get their come-uppance; egotism takes its fall. Miller, indeed, suggests that *The Avengers* was "all about common sense in place of the grand narrative of scientific progress." Certainly, politically, it endorsed nothing more radical than the workable virtues of democracy, civic responsibility, and political moderation. Calmly, collectively, Steed and Peel restore order from chaos—and then crack open the champagne.

Steed, the show's mainstay, is in Macnee's own words, "a hero dressed and accoutered like a junior cabinet minister." The character, we're told, attended Eton. Later he trained at Sandhurst, and served as an army officer in World War II. He knows books, food, wine. In fact, although his wardrobe is strictly British, Steed's palate—and much of his style—is decidedly continental, as befits a hero at work in the era of the Common Market and the devalued pound.

Thus in *Heil Harris!*—one of several "official" *Avengers* novels published in the late 1960s—we find Steed physically and mentally exhausted after a particularly tough case and considering anew the restorative powers of "a bottle of 1947 Barolo" placed beside some *lasagne al forno Piemontese*.

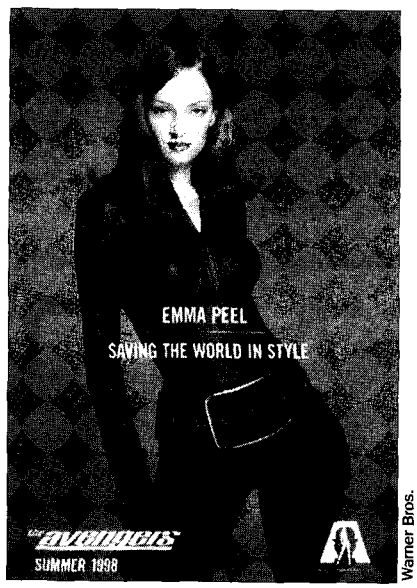
But, being a good Brit, the unflappable Steed never takes himself too seriously. Self-importance, of course, has long been a cardinal sin in

Archive Photos

Diana Rigg as the first Mrs. Peel

Britain, and a prime target for comic artists from Shakespeare to Dickens to Monty Python. Even as he's bashing the bad guys Steed leaves the impression that, all things considered, he'd much rather be doing something else—a bit of gardening, perhaps. Miller cites a scene at the close of one *Avengers* episode in which Steed, facing a firing squad, is asked to name his last request. "Would you," he replies, "cancel my milk?"

Uma Thurman as the second Mrs. Peel



Warner Bros.

As Miller notes, *The Avengers* has inspired a host of spin-offs and imitations, beginning in the mid-1970s with *The New Avengers* (a short-lived series that even Macnee, one of its principals, describes as "an extremely bad retread of *Kojak*") and culminating with the new Hollywood version of *The Avengers*. (Miller's book has been published just in time to provide this summer's reviewers with all the information they need to compare the movie to its television original.)

But the influence of *The Avengers* is not just in nostalgia. Its influence is visible, for example, in the 1990s television blockbuster *The X-Files*, another "cult" favorite that has triggered its own share of fan clubs, critical commentaries, and related product lines. Like *The Avengers*, *The X-Files* features two government agents—male and female—whose relationship is professionally close but personally unclear.

Each week agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully find themselves in bizarre and deadly situations, dealing with vampires, paranormal pyromaniacs, and mysterious mutants posing as any number of things, including Renaissance scholars and computer geeks. So too, like *The Avengers*, *The X-Files* mixes wit with suspense; it's intelligent, allusive, and full of parody.

The X-Files, however, is also portentous and dark, owing more to Oliver Stone than Oliver Hardy. Mulder and Scully—a humorless pair—are forever mucking about in swamps and sewers, tracking a vast, endless conspiracy that appears to involve nearly everyone: space aliens, Pentagon generals, cigarette smokers, and the guy next door.

The Avengers—created only two decades after the defeat of Nazism—belongs to a world that still believes in its bones that the forces of evil lunacy can be bested by the combined forces of courage, civility, and good cheer. And that, more than ever, is the real secret of its charm. ♦

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BRILL-

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Steven Brill was standing on Brill's Feet looking at Brill's Face in Brill's Mirror, when it occurred to him, "There are thousands of magazines in America, but none of them has the name Steven Brill in the title. Clearly this is a market niche waiting to be filled." Brill was once again struck by Brill's Genius and rewarded himself by reaching for an extra dollop of his hair mousse, Brill Cream.

His first notion was that the magazine should be about himself, *Brill's Brill*. But then he glanced over at MSNBC and saw a group of reporters on television. If there is one thing that disgusts Brill, it is vain media types who are consumed by their own oversized egos. So at that moment he vowed to expose the arrogance, sloppiness, and bias of the American media by putting out a magazine that is arrogant, sloppy, and biased. *Brill's Content* was born.

Brill knew the task ahead would not be easy. He had to make a splash with his first issue by writing a story that would steal Bob Woodward's prose style and still be so one-sided and biased that David Brock would want to apologize for it just out of habit. Going into full shoe-leather mode, he immediately called the man he admired most in journalism, fellow Clinton suck-up Geraldo Rivera. "I'm going to be promoting the heck out of my first issue, Gerry," he said. "What shade of pancake make-up do you use?" Accounts differ over what Rivera said next. Rivera claims he responded, "Number 2." But Brill contends Rivera replied, "I have it on good authority that Lucianne Goldberg is an evil genius who is masterminding a plot to destroy America." Brill is not the sort of shallow journalist who relies on single-sourcing, so he called Sidney Blumenthal for verification, and within hours he had his lede.

—with additional reporting by Steven Brill, editing by Steven Brill, layout by Steven Brill, cover design by Steven Brill, internal flattery by Michael Kramer.

BY STEVEN BRILL

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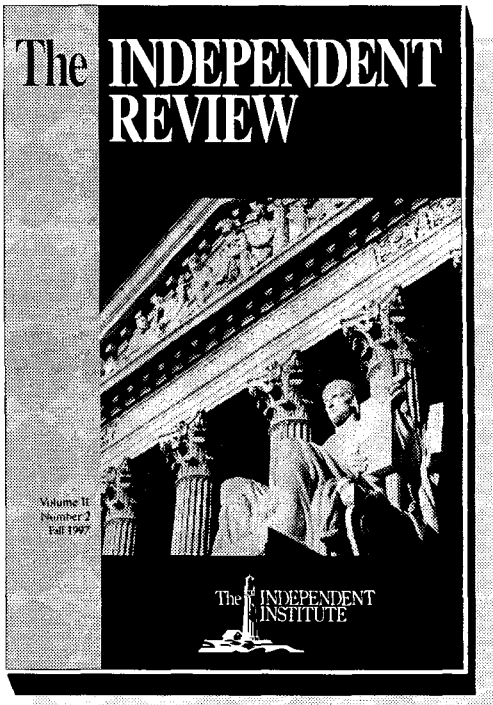

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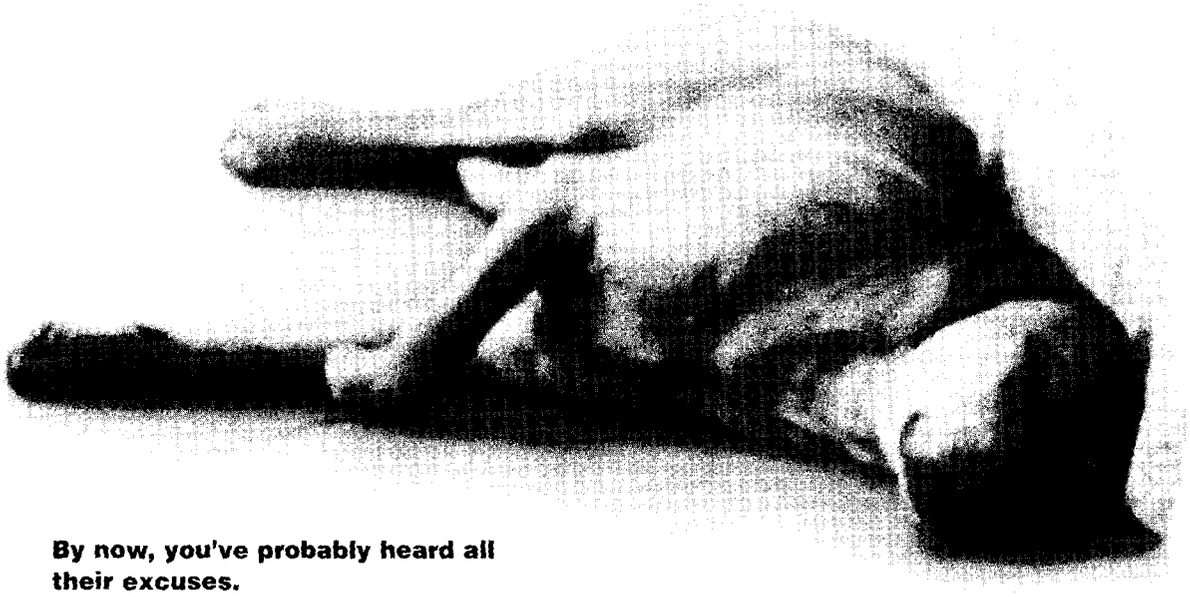
How Long Will These Sleeping Dogs Lie?



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MCI and AT&T have given up on local residential service. Why? The markets are open. Smaller companies are competing. Competition is here.

MCI and AT&T are stalling competition. They only want competition on their own terms. On their own timetable. That's what their executives conceded during recent merger discussions.

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